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The Hudson Review

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ROBERT GRAVES

The Language of Myth

Addenda to *The White Goddess*

I

CALL ME, if you like, the fox who has lost his brush; I am nobody's servant and have chosen to live on the outskirts of a Majorcan mountain-village, Catholic but anti-ecclesiastical, where life is still ruled by the old agricultural cycle. Without my brush, namely my contact with urban civilization, all that I write about the White Goddess, the patroness of poets, must read perversely and irrelevantly to such of you as are still geared to the industrial machine, whether directly as workers, managers, traders or advertisers, or indirectly as civil servants, publishers, journalists, schoolmasters or employees of a radio corporation. If you are poets, you will realize that acceptance of my historical thesis commits you to a confession of disloyalty which you will be loth to make; you chose your jobs because they promised to provide you with a steady income and leisure to render the Goddess whom you adore valuable part-time service. Who am I, you will ask, to warn you that she demands either whole-time service or none at all? And do I suggest that you should resign your jobs and, for want of sufficient capital to set up as small-holders, turn romantic shepherds—as Don Quixote did after his failure to come to terms with the modern world—in remote unmechanized farms? No, my brushlessness debars me from offering any practical suggestion. I dare attempt only a historical statement of the problem; how you come to terms with the Goddess is no concern of mine. I do not even know whether you are serious in your poetic profession.

II

One of the most uncompromising rejections of early Greek mythology was made by Socrates. Myths frightened or offended

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him; he preferred to turn his back on them and discipline his mind to think scientifically: "to investigate the reason of the being of everything—of everything as it is, not as it appears, and to reject all opinions of which no account can be given."

Here is a typical passage from Plato's *Phaedrus,* (Cary's translation):

> *Phae.* Tell me, Socrates, is not Boreas reported to have carried off Orithya from somewhere about this part of the Ilissus?
>
> *Socr.* So it is said.
>
> *Phae.* Must it not have been from this spot? for the water hereabouts appears beautiful, clear and transparent, and well suited for damsels to sport about.
>
> *Socr.* No, but lower down, as much as two or three stadia, where we cross over to the temple of the Huntress, and where there is, on the very spot, a kind of altar sacred to Boreas.
>
> *Phae.* I never noticed it. But tell me, by Jupiter, Socrates, do you believe that this fabulous account is true?
>
> *Socr.* If I disbelieved it, as the wise do, I should not be guilty of any absurdity: then having recourse to subtleties, I should say that a blast of Boreas threw her down from the neighboring cliffs, as she was sporting with Pharmacea, and that having thus met her death she was said to have been carried off by Boreas, or from Mars' hill; for there is also another report that she was carried off from thence and not from this spot. But I, for my part, Phaedrus, consider such things as pretty enough, but as the province of a very curious, painstaking, and not very happy man, and for no other reason than that after this he must set us right as to the form of the Hippocentaurs, and then as to that of the Chimaera; besides, there pours in upon him a crowd of similar monsters, Gorgons and Pegasuses, and other monstrous creatures, incredible in number and absurdity, which if anyone were to disbelieve and endeavour to reconcile each with probability, employing for this purpose a kind of vulgar cleverness, he will stand in need of abundant leisure. But I have no leisure at all for such matters; and the cause of it, my friend, is this; I am not yet able, according to the Delphic precept, to know myself. But it appears to me to be ridiculous, while I am still ignorant of this, to busy myself about matters that do not concern me.

The fact was, that by Socrates' time the sense of most myths belonging to the previous epoch was either forgotten or kept a close religious secret, though they were still preserved pictorially in religious art and still current as fairy-tales from which the

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poets quoted. When invited to believe in the Chimaera, the horse-centaurs, or the winged horse Pegasus, all of them straightforward Pelasgian cult-symbols, a philosopher felt bound to reject them as a-zoölogical improbabilities; and because he had no notion of the true identity of "the nymph Orithya" or of the history of the ancient Athenian cult of Boreas, he could give only an inept naturalistic explanation of her rape at Mount Ilissus: "doubtless she was blown off one of the cliffs hereabouts and met her death at the foot."

All the problems that Socrates mentions have been faced in *The White Goddess* and solved to my own satisfaction at least; but though "a very curious and painstaking person" I cannot agree that I am any less happy than Socrates was, or that I have more leisure than he had, or that an understanding of the language of myth is irrelevant to self-knowledge. I deduce from the petulant tone of his phrase "vulgar cleverness" that he had spent a long time worrying about the Chimaera, the horse-centaurs and the rest, but that the "reasons of their being" had eluded him because he was no poet and mistrusted poets, and because, as he admitted to Phaedrus, he was a confirmed townsman who seldom visited the countryside: "fields and trees will not teach me anything, but men do." The study of mythology, as I have shown, is based squarely on tree-lore and seasonal observation of life in the fields.

Socrates, in turning his back on poetic myths, was really turning his back on the Moon-goddess who inspired them and who demanded that man should pay woman spiritual and sexual homage: what is called Platonic love, the philosopher's escape from the power of the Goddess into intellectual homosexuality, was really Socratic love. He could not plead ignorance: Diotima Mantinice, the Arcadian prophetess who magically arrested the plague at Athens, had reminded him once that man's love was properly directed towards women and that Moira, Ilithyia, and Callone—Death, Birth and Beauty—formed a triad of Goddesses who presided over all acts of generation whatsoever, physical, spiritual or intellectual. In the passage of the *Symposium* in which Plato reports Socrates' account of Diotima's wise words, the banquet is interrupted by Alcibiades, who comes in very drunk in search of a beautiful boy called Agathon and finds him reclining next to Socrates. Presently he tells everyone that he

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himself once encouraged Socrates, who was in love with him, to an act of sodomy from which, however, he philosophically abstained, remaining perfectly satisfied with night-long chaste embraces of his beloved's beautiful body. Had Diotima been present to hear this she would have made a wry face and spat three times into her bosom: for though the Goddess as Cybele and Ishtar tolerated sodomy even in her own temple-courts, ideal homosexuality was a far more serious moral aberrancy—it was the male intellect trying to make itself spiritually self-sufficient. Her revenge on Socrates—if I may put it this way—for trying to know himself in the cerebral Apollonian style instead of leaving the task to a wife or mistress, was characteristic: she found him a shrew for a wife and made him fix his idealistic affections on this same Alcibiades, who disgraced him by growing up vicious, godless, treacherous and selfish—the ruin of Athens. She ended his life with a draught of the white-flowered, mousey-smelling hemlock, a plant sacred to herself as Hecate[1], prescribed him by his fellow-citizens in punishment for his corruption of youth. After his death his disciples made a martyr of him, and under their influence myths fell into still greater disrepute, becoming at last the subject of street-corner witticisms or being "explained away" by Euhemerus of Messenia and his successors as corruptions of history. The Euhemerist account of the Actaeon myth, for instance, is that he was an Arcadian gentleman who was so addicted to hunting that the expense of keeping a pack of hounds ate him up.

III

As soon as one has mastered the elementary grammar and accidence of myth, built up a small vocabulary, and learned to distinguish seasonal myths from historical and iconotropic myths, one is surprised how close to the surface lie the explanations, lost since pre-Homeric times, of legends that are still religiously conserved as part of our European cultural inheritance. For example, the various legends of the halcyon, or kingfisher, which like the wren is associated in Greek myth with the winter solstice. There were fourteen "halcyon days" every year, seven of which fell

[1]As Shakespeare knew. See *Macbeth, IV, 1, 25.*

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before the winter solstice, seven after: peaceful days when the sea was smooth as a pond and the hen-halcyon built a floating nest and hatched out her young. According to Plutarch and Aelian, she had another habit, of carrying her dead mate on her back over the sea and mourning him with a peculiarly plaintive cry.

The number fourteen is a moon-number, the days of the lucky first half of the month; so the legend (which has no foundation in natural history, because the halcyon does not build a nest at all but lays its eggs in holes by the waterside) evidently refers to the birth of the new sacred king at the winter solstice—after his mother, the Moon-goddess, has conveyed the old king's corpse to a sepulchral island. Naturally, the winter solstice would not always coincide with the same phase of the moon, so "every year" must be understood as "every Great Year," at the close of which solar and lunar time were roughly synchronized and the sacred king's term ended.

Homer connects the halcyon with Alcyone, a title of Meleager's wife Cleopatra (*Iliad, IX, 562*) and with an earlier Alcyone who was daughter to Aegeale, "she who wards off the hurricane," by Aeolus, the eponymous ancestor of the Aeolian Greeks. The word "halcyon" cannot therefore mean *hal-cyon,* "sea-hound," as is usually supposed, but must stand for *alcy-one,* "princess who averts evil." This derivation is confirmed by the fable told by Apollodorus and Hyginus, and briefly mentioned by Homer, of the earlier Alcyone: how she and her husband Ceyx ("sea-mew") dared call themselves Hera and Zeus, and how the real Zeus punished them by drowning Ceyx, whereupon Alcyone also drowned herself. Ceyx was then metamorphosed into a sea-mew or, according to Alcman, into a razor-bill, and she into a halcyon. The sea-mew part of the legend need not be pressed, though the bird, which has a very plaintive cry, is sacred to the Sea-goddess Aphrodite; the historical basis seems to be that late in the second millennium B.C. the Aeolians, who had agreed to worship the pre-Hellenic Moon-goddess as their divine ancestress and protectress, became tributary to the Achaeans and were forced to accept the Olympian religion.

Pliny, who carefully describes the halcyon's alleged nest—apparently the zoöphyte which Linnaeus called *halcyoneum*—

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reports that the halcyon is rarely seen and then only at the winter and summer solstices and at the setting of the Pleiads. This proves her to have originally been a manifestation of the Moon-goddess who was worshipped at the two solstices as the Goddess of alternately Life-in-Death and Death-in-Life—and who early in November, when the Pleiads set, sent the sacred king his summons to death. Still another Alcyone, daughter to Pleione, "Queen of Sailing," by the oak-hero Atlas was the mystical leader of the seven Pleiads. The heliacal rising of the Pleiads in May marked the beginning of the navigational year; their setting marked its end when (as Pliny observes in a passage about the halcyon) a remarkably cold North wind blows. The circumstances of Ceyx's death show that the Aeolians, who were famous sailors, gave the goddess the title "Alcyone" because as Sea-goddess she protected them from rocks and rough weather: for Zeus had wrecked him in defiance of Alcyone's powers by hurling lightning at the ship. The halcyon continued for centuries to be credited with the magical power of allaying storms, and its body when dried was used as a talisman against Zeus' lightning—supposedly on the ground that where once it strikes, it will not strike again. I have twice (with an interval of many years) seen a halcyon skimming the surface of the same Mediterranean bay, on both occasions about midsummer when the sea was without a ripple: its startingly bright blue and white plumage made it an unforgettable symbol of the Goddess of calm seas.

The connection made by Homer between Meleager's wife Alcyone and the halcyon is that when her mother, Marpessa, was carried off by Apollo from Idas the Argonaut, her beloved husband, she mourned him as bitterly as the earlier Alcyone had mourned Ceyx and therefore gave her new-born daughter Cleopatra the surname "Alcyone." This is nonsense. A priestess named Cleopatra whom the original Meleager married may well have borne the divine title "Alcyone;" but it is likely that Alcyone was called the daughter of Marpessa ("the snatcher") because Marpessa was the White Goddess as the Old Sow who ruled mid-winter and because the halcyon days fall at mid-winter. This would, incidentally, explain why Pliny recommended dried and pulverized halcyon nests as a "wonderful cure" for leprosy; sow's milk was held to cause leprosy and Alcyone as Marpessa's

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benignant daughter would be immune against the infection. Apollo's rape of Marpessa at Messene, like his rape of Daphne ("the bloody one") at Delphi, are events in early Greek tribal history: seizures of oracular shrines by the Achaean partisans of Apollo.

IV

In the ancient Welsh legend of Branwen, and the ancient Irish legend of Marvan and the Bards, swine-herds are credited with prophetic powers. Evidence of a similar function in early Greece is the conventional epithet *dios*, "divine," applied in the *Odyssey* to the swine-herd Eumaeus. Because of the horror in which swine-herds were held by the Jews and Egyptians and the contempt in which, thanks to the Prodigal Son, they have long been held in Europe, the word is usually mis-translated "honest or worthy" though admitted to be an *hapax legomenon*. It is true that except on one night of the year, the full moon that fell nearest to the winter solstice, when the pig was sacrificed to Isis and Osiris and its flesh eaten by every Egyptian, the taboo on any contact with pigs was so strong that swine-herds, though full-blooded Egyptians (according to Herodotus), were avoided like the plague and forced to marry within their own caste; but this was a tribute to their sanctity rather than anything else. The public hangman is similarly avoided in France and England because he has courageously undertaken, in the interests of public morality, a peculiarly horrible and thankless trade.

V

Why the cat, pig, and wolf were considered particularly sacred to the Moon-goddess is not hard to discover. Wolves howl to the moon and feed on corpse-flesh, their eyes shine in the dark, and they haunt wooded mountains. Cats' eyes similarly shine in the dark, they feed on mice (symbol of pestilence), mate openly and walk inaudibly, they are prolific but eat their own young, and their colours vary, like the moon, between white, reddish and black. Pigs also vary between white, reddish and black, feed on corpse-flesh, are prolific but eat their own young, and their tusks are crescent-shaped.

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VI

It has been suggested in a footnote to Chapter Twelve that the Goddess of the sepulchral island of Alyscamps, in the Rhône, was named Alys[2] and that the alder, *aliso* in Spanish, was named after her. Dauzat in his *Dictionnaire Etymologique* connects *alisier,* the service-tree, with *aliso,* the alder which screened these sepulchral islands. Since the service-tree has white blossoms and since its fruit, the sorb, is a sort of crab-apple, it is likely that this was the apple of immortality in pre-Christian France and Spain. If so, the Elysian Fields, or Alyscamps, would have the same meaning as Avalon: apple-orchards. The sorb emblemizes "from corruption, sweetness": it cannot be eaten until it has rotted to a corpse-like purple-brown. Perhaps this is why the tree is mentioned in *The Hearings of the Scholars* as a euphemism for yew, the death-tree; though the explanation there given is that both bore the name "oldest of woods"; "oldest," as applied to the service-tree, could mean only "of most ancient fame," because it is not particularly long-lived.

Mr. Kenneth Dutfield in a recent letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* plausibly suggests that *Avernus,* the abode of the dead, which the Latins incorrectly derived from the Greek *a-ornis,* "birdless," is the same word as *Avalon;* which would identify the Elysian Fields with Avernus. Lake Avernus near Cumae apparently won its nickname from the unhealthy airs of the surrounding marshes and from the near-by shrine of the Cumaean Sibyl who conjured up the spirits of the dead.

Though the apple was the most palatable of wild fruits growing on trees, why should it have been given such immense mythic importance? The clue is to be found in the Irish legend of Curoi's soul that was hidden in an apple; when the apple was cut across by Cuchulain's sword "night fell upon Curoi." For if an apple is halved cross-wise each half shows a five-pointed star in the

[2]Alys also appears as *alise* or *alis* in many French place-names. Dauzat's *Dictionnaire Etymologique,* under *alis, alise,* meaning a "sheltered creek," derives it from "the Gaulish word *alisia,* perhaps pre-Celtic, which is represented by numerous place-names, and which must also have provided the Spanish word for alder, *aliso.*" This makes good mythical sense, because Calypso's sepulchral island of Ogygia was screened by alder thickets. Alys or Alis or Halys is the name of the biggest river of Asia Minor, and that it is pre-Hellenic is shown by the town of Aliassus (*-assus* is a Cretan termination) built on its banks just before it turns north to empty into the Southern Black Sea. There are also two Hales rivers, one in Ionia, the other in Lucania, which may be named after the same goddess.

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centre, emblem of immortality, which represents the Goddess in her five stations from birth to death and back to birth again. *It also represents the planet of Venus—Venus to whom the apple* was sacred—adored as Hesper the evening star on one half of the apple, and as Lucifer Son of the Morning on the other.

In the Eastern Mediterranean the apple, which was sacred to Hercules, did not grow south of Euboea in classical times; the quince took its place.

VII

The nine steps that a crane is said to take before it flies prove it sacred to the moon; and so does its neck, feathered white and black with reddish skin showing through, or (in the case of the Numidian, or Balearic, crane) with actual red wattles. Cranes make their spectacular migrations from the Tropic of Cancer to the Arctic Circle and back twice yearly, flying in chevron formation with loud trumpetings at an enormous height; and this must have attached them to the Hyperborean cult as messengers flying to the other world which lies at the back of the North Wind. But Thoth, who invented hieroglyphs, was symbolized by the ibis, another wader also sacred to the moon; and the Greeks identified Thoth with Hermes, conductor of souls and messenger of the gods, whom Pherecydes addresses as "ibis-shaped." So Hermes is credited by Hyginus with having invented the alphabet after watching the flight of cranes, and the crane takes on the scholarly attributes of the ibis, which did not visit Greece.

In Greece the crane was associated with poets, as it was in Ireland; not only in the story of Apollo's metamorphosis into "a crane, a Thracian bird"—meaning the red-wattled Numidian crane which visited the Northern Aegean—but in the story of Ibycus, the sixth-century B.C. Greek erotic poet who, having spent the best part of his life in the island of Samos, was one day set upon by bandits in a lonely place near Corinth and mortally wounded. He called upon a passing flock of cranes to avenge his death and soon afterwards the cranes hovered over the heads of the audience in the Corinthian open-air theatre; whereupon one of the murderers, who was present, cried out:

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"Look, the avengers of Ibycus!" He was arrested and made a full confession.

VIII

An interesting survival of the ancient winnowing-feast mysteries of which the most famous were the Eleusinian, is the Majorcan *xiurell,* or white clay whistle, decorated in red and green, and hand-made in the traditional shapes of mermaid, coiled serpent, bull-headed man, full-skirted woman with a round hat rocking a baby in her arms, or with a flower instead of a baby, the same with a moon-disk surmounted by cow's horns, man with a tall peaked hat and arms upraised in adoration, and little man riding on a hornless, prick-eared, long-legged animal with a very short muzzle. It figures, with quince-boughs and boughs of the sorb-apple, in an ecclesiastical festival held at the village of Bonanova near Palma when the villagers perambulate a hill at night on the first Sunday after the 12th of September (the Feast of the Blessed Name of the Virgin Mary) which corresponds with the 23rd of September, old style. The object of the whistle must originally have been to induce the North-East winnowing winds which, according to the local almanack, begin to blow at this season and which at the end of the month summon rain clouds from the Atlantic Ocean to soak the winter wheat planted earlier in the month. But this is forgotten: winnowing in Majorca is now done at any time after the harvest and not celebrated with any festivities.

The mermaid, locally called a "siren," evidently represents Daeira (Aphrodite), the moon-mother of Eleusis (the Corn-Dionysus who is shown with her in the woman-and-baby *xiurell*); the bull-headed man is Dionysus himself grown to manhood; the man in the hat is a Tutor, or *gran mascara;* the little rider is likely to be Dionysus again but the species of his tall mount is indeterminate. The quince-boughs, sorb-boughs, and the white clay are also in honour of the Goddess—now invoked as the Virgin Mary. The Serpent is the wind itself. Since this is the only time of the year when wind is welcomed by the Majorcans who, being largely arboricultural, fear the sirocco as they fear the Devil—the farmer's purse, as they say, hangs on the bough of

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a tree—the sound of whistling is not heard in the island except in the *xiurell* season. The ploughman sings as he drives his mule and the schoolboy as he runs home from school; for the rest *furbis, flabis, flebis*—"whistle shrill, weep long."

IX

In Chapters Ten and Twelve I show that the Beth-Luis-Nion, the secret tree-alphabet of Ancient Ireland, Wales and the Isle of Man, was a calendar of the Celtic year, the key to which was provided in the Song of Amergin. This year consisted of thirteen "common-law" months of twenty-eight days each, with one day over, which fell on December 23rd. The consonantal order of the Beth-Luis-Nion, which means Birch-Rowan-Ash, was as follows: B, birch; L, rowan; N, ash; F, alder; S, willow; H, hawthorn; D, oak; T, holly; C, hazel; M, vine; G, ivy; Ng, canna-reed; R, elder. Each letter was attached to a month, beginning with December 24th. The order of the vowels was A, silver fir; O, gorse; U, heath; E, poplar; I, yew. Each vowel had a quarter-day, except A and I, which shared the winter-solstice. Two consonants, S and C, were doubled to make the extra consonants SS (Z, blackthorn) and CC (Q, apple). Both the vowel-sequence and the consonant-sequence corresponded with the seasonal virtues of the trees they contained. To disguise these secrets, which were connected with divination, the bards invented numerous other "oghams," or secret alphabets, to supplement the Beth-Luis-Nion. Each was designed to preserve the original magic.

Consider, for instance, the Bird-ogham and Colour-ogham in the *Book of Ballymote*. The composers of these two cyphers had to bear in mind not only the initial of every word but its poetic relation to the already established letter-month or letter-day. Thus no migratory bird appears in the list of winter months, and *samad* (sorrel) is not applied to the S-month (April 16th-May 13th), as one might have expected, because the sorrel plant goes sorrel-colour only in the late summer. The lists could have been made more nearly poetic if the initials had allowed; thus the Robin, the leader of the St. Stephen's Day wren-hunt, would doubtless have led in the year, had he begun with a B, not an S *(spidéog)*; and there was no word for Owl that could be used

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for the Ng-month (October 29th-November 25th) when owls are most vocal.

I can best make my point by glossing the cyphers in imitation of the style used in the *Book of Ballymote* itself, drawing on bardic lore in every case.

Day of the Winter Solstice—A—*aidhircleóg,* lapwing; *alad,* piebald.

Why is the Lapwing at the head of the vowels?

Not hard to answer. It is a reminder that the secrets of the Beth-Luis-Nion must be hidden by deception and equivocation, as the lapwing hides her eggs. And Piebald is the colour of this mid-winter season when wise men keep to their chimney-corners, which are black with soot inside and outside white with snow; and the Goddess of Life-in-Death and Death-in-Life, whose prophetic bird is the piebald magpie.

Day of the Spring Equinox — O — *odorscrach,* cormorant; *odhar,* dun.

Why is the Cormorant next?

Not hard. This is the season of Lent when, because of the Church's ban on the eating of meat and the scarcity of other foods, men become Cormorants in their greed for fish. And Dun is the colour of the newly ploughed fields.

Day of the Summer Solstice—U—*uiseóg,* lark; *usgdha,* resin-coloured.

Why is the Lark in the central place?

Not hard. At this season the Sun is at his highest point, and the Lark flies singing up to adore him. Because of the heat the trees split and ooze resin, and Resin-coloured is the honey that the heather yields.

Day of the Autumn Equinox—E—*ela,* whistling swan; *erc,* rufous-red.

Why is the Whistling Swan in the next place?

Not hard. At this season the Swan and her young prepare for flight. And Rufous-red is the colour of the bracken, and of the Swan's neck.

Day of the Winter Solstice — I — *illait,* eaglet; *irfind,* very white.

Why is the Eaglet in the next place?

Not hard. The Eaglet's maw is insatiable, like that of Death,

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whose season this is. And Very White are the bones in his nest, and the snow on the cliff-edge.

* * *

December 24-January 21—B—*besan,* pheasant; *bán,* white.

Why is the Pheasant at the head of the consonants?

Not hard. This is the month of which Amergin sang: "I am the Stag of Seven Tines"; and as venison is the best flesh that runs, so Pheasant is the best that flies. And White is the colour of this Stag and of this Pheasant.

January 22-February 18—L—*lachu,* duck; *liath,* grey.

Why is the Duck in the next place?

Not hard. This is the month of floods, when Ducks swim over the meadows. And Grey is the colour of flood-water and of rainy skies.

February 19-March 18—N—*naescu,* snipe; *necht,* clear.

Why is the Snipe in the next place?

Not hard. This is the month of the mad March Wind that whirls like a Snipe. And Clear is the colour of Wind.

March 19-April 15—F—*faelinn,* gull; *flann,* crimson.

Why is the Gull in the next place?

Not hard. In this month Gulls congregate on the ploughed fields. And Crimson is the colour of the *glain,* the magical egg which is found in this month, and of alder-dye, and of the Young Sun struggling through the haze.

April 16-May 13—S—*seg,* hawk; *sodath,* fine-coloured.

Why is the Hawk in the next place?

Not hard. Amergin sang of this month: "I am a Hawk on a Cliff." And Fine-coloured are its meadows.

The same—SS—*stmolach,* thrush; *sorcha,* bright-coloured.

Why is the Thrush joined with the Hawk?

Not hard. The Thrush sings his sweetest in this month. And Bright-coloured are the new leaves.

May 14-June 10—H—*hadaig,* night-crow; *huath,* terrible.

Why is the Night-crow in the next place?

Not hard. This is the month when we refrain from carnal pleasures because of terror, which in Irish is *uath,* and the Night-crow brings terror. Terrible is its colour.

June 11-July 8—D—*droen,* wren; *dub,* black.

Why is the Wren in the central place?

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Not hard. The Oak is the tree of Druids and the king of trees, and the Wren, *Drui-én,* is the bird of the Druids and the King of all birds. And the Wren is the soul of the Oak. Black is the colour of the Oak when the lightning blasts it, and black the faces of those who leap between the Midsummer fires.

July 9-August 5—T—*truith,* starling; *temen,* dark-grey.

Why is the Starling in the next place?

Not hard. Amergin sang of this month: "I am a Spear that roars for blood." It is the warrior's month, and the Starlings' well-trained army will wheel swiftly and smoothly on a pivot, to the left or to the right, without a word of command or exhortation; thus battles are won, not by single feats and broken ranks. And Dark-grey is the colour of Iron, the warriors' metal.

August 6-September 2—C—[*corr,* crane]; *cron,* brown.

Why is the Crane in the next place?

Not hard. This is the month of wisdom, and the wisdom of the God Manannan Mac Lir, namely the Beth-Luis-Nion, was wrapped in Crane-skin. And Brown are the nuts of the Hazel, tree of wisdom.

The same—Q—*querc,* hen; *quiar,* mouse-coloured.

Why is the Hen joined with the Crane?

Not hard. When the harvest is carted, and the gleaners have gone, the Hen is turned into the cornfields to fatten on what she can find. And a Mouse-coloured little rival creeps around with her.

September 2-September 30—M—*mintan,* titmouse; *mbracht,* variegated.

Why is the Titmouse in the next place?

Not hard. Amergin sang of this month: "I am a Hill of Poetry"; and this is the month of the poet, who is the least easily abashed of men, as the Titmouse is the least easily abashed of birds. Both band together in companies in this month, and go on circuit in search of a liberal hand; and as the Titmouse climbs spirally up a tree, so the Poet also spirals to immortality. And Variegated is the colour of the Titmouse, and of the Master-poet's dress.

October 1-October 28—G—*géis,* mute swan; *gorm,* blue.

Why is the Mute Swan in the next place?

Not hard. In this month he prepares to follow his companion

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the Whistling Swan. And Blue is the haze on the hills, Blue the smoke of the burning weed, Blue the skies before the November rain.

October 29-November 25 — Ng — *ngéigh,* goose; *nglas,* glass-green.

Why is the Goose in the next place?

Not hard. In this month the tame goose is brought in from misty pasture to be cooped and fattened for the mid-winter feast; and the wild goose mourns for him in the misty meadows. And Glassy-green is the wave that thuds against the cliff, a warning that the year must end.

November 26-December 22—R—*rócnat,* rook; *ruadh,* blood-red.

Why is the Rook in the last place?

Not hard. He wears mourning for the year that dies in this month. And Blood-red are the rags of leaves on the elder-trees, a token of the slaughter.

* * *

The Pheasant was the best available bird for the B-month, *bran* the raven and *bunnan* the bittern being better suited to later months of the year. The author of the article on pheasants in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* states that pheasants (sacred birds in Greece) are likely to have been indigenous to the British Isles and that the white, or "Bohemian," variety often appears among pheasants of ordinary plumage.

It is possible that the original S-colour was *serind,* primrose, but that the primrose's erotic reputation led to its replacement by the euphemism, *sodath.*

The omission of *corr,* the Crane, for the C-month is intentional; the contents of the Crane-bag were a close secret and all reference to it was discouraged.

And what of December 23rd, the extra day of the year, on which the young King, or Spirit of the Year, was crowned and given eagle's wings, and which was expressed by the semi-vowel J, written as double I? Its bird was naturally the Eagle, *iolar* in Irish, which has the right initial. The Irish poets were so chary of mentioning this day that we do not even know what its tree was; yet that they regarded the Eagle as its bird is proved by the use of the dimunitive *illait,* Eaglet, for the letter I: that is

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to say that if the extra day, double-I, had not been secretly given the cypher-equivalent *iolar,* there would be no need to express the preceding day, that of the Winter Solstice, namely single I, by *illait,* Eaglet—for E is not expressed by Cygnet, nor A by Lapwing-chick.

These cyphers were used to mystify and deceive all ordinary people who were not in the secret. For example, if one poet asked another in public: "When shall we two meet again?" he would expect an answer in which elements of several cypher alphabets were used, and which was further disguised by being spelt backwards or put in a foreign language, or both. He might, for instance, be answered in a sentence built up from the Colour, Bird, Tree and Fortress oghams:

When a *brown* plumaged *rook* perches on the *fir* below the Fortress of *Seolae.*

That would spell out the Latin CRAS—"tomorrow."

Besides the one hundred and fifty regular cypher-alphabets that the candidate for the ollaveship had to learn, there were countless other tricks for putting the uninitiated off the scent; for example, the use of the letter after, or before, the desired one. Often a synonym was used for the tree-cypher word—"the chief overseer of Nimrod's Tower" for *Beth,* birch; "activity of bees" for *Saille,* willow; "pack of wolves" for *Straif,* hawthorn, and so on.

In one of the cypher-alphabets, *Luis* is given as elm, not rowan, because the Irish word for elm, *lemh,* begins with an L; *Tinne* is given as elder because the Irish word for elder, *trom,* begins with a T; similarly, *Quert* is given as *quulend,* holly. This trick may account for *Ngetal,* reed, being so frequently read as broom, the Irish of which is *n'glicach;* but there is also a practical poetic reason for the change. The *Book of Ballymote* gives broom the poetic name of "Physicians' Strength," presumably because its bitter shoots, being diuretic, were prized as "a remedy for surfeits and to all diseases arising therefrom." (A decoction of broom-flowers was Henry VIII's favourite medicine.) A medical tree suited the month of November, when the year was dying and the cold winds kept well-to-do people indoors with little diversion but eating and drinking.

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X

Since I recently had the ill-luck to tread on a Pyrenean viper—a variety stated to be eight times more lethal than the English—I can assert confidently that "Silver Island" or "White Island," or "Revolving Island," to which the sacred king goes at his death, is prophetically seen by him when his heel is bitten by the serpent or scorpion, or pricked with the (presumably) poisoned arrow. Soon after the first pain and vomiting my eyesight began to fail. A small silver spot appeared in the centre of my field of vision, which gradually enlarged into an island with sharply defined bastions; the shores spread wider and wider, as though I were nearing it across a sea. When I started to walk home, I could not see where I was going; and then the island began slowly to revolve in a clockwise direction. I cannot say whether it would have revolved the canonical four times if the poison had been more virulent or if I had been obsessed by the sense of coming death as these kings were; the illusion had faded long before I was given an anti-toxin. I was thankful that, unlike my youngest son whom I was carrying on my shoulder at the time, I had not been born on the day of the winter solstice. My foot remained so swollen for a couple of months that I could only hobble. Finally a Catalan doctor prescribed hot fomentations of wild-olive leaves, which reduced the swelling within three days. This traditional remedy has mythological sense as well as practical value: the wild-olive is the equivalent of birch in the Mediterranean version of the tree alphabet and therefore a prime expulsive of lingering venom.

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WALLACE STEVENS

The Course of a Particular

Today the leaves cry, hanging on branches swept by wind,
Yet the nothingness of winter becomes a little less.
It is still full of icy shades and shapen snow.

The leaves cry . . . One holds off and merely hears the cry.
It is a busy cry, concerning someone else.
And though one says that one is part of everything,

There is a conflict, there is a resistance involved;
And being part is an exertion that declines:
One feels the life of that which gives life as it is.

The leaves cry. It is not a cry of divine attention,
Nor the smoke-drift of puffed-out heroes, nor human cry.
It is the cry of leaves that do not transcend themselves,

In the absence of fantasia, without meaning more
Than they are in the final finding of the ear, in the thing
Itself, until, at last, the cry concerns no one at all.

Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour

Light the first light of evening, as in a room
In which we rest and, for small reason, think
The world imagined is the ultimate good.

This is, therefore, the intensest rendezvous.
It is in that thought that we collect ourselves,
Out of all the indifferences, into one thing:

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Within a single thing, a single shawl
Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a warmth,
A light, a power, the miraculous influence.

Here, now, we forget each other and ourselves.
We feel the obscurity of an order, a whole,
A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous,

Within its vital boundary, in the mind.
We say God and the imagination are one.
How high that highest candle lights the dark . . .

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough.

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HARVEY SWADOS

The Letters

THE FIRST WEEK out of Brisbane was a throbbing nightmare. The tanker rode easily enough in the long slow swells of the South Pacific, but Philip Stolz, the radio operator, was slow in recovering from a prolonged bout of alcohol and sex in which he had indulged at Lennons Hotel.

The ship had sailed somewhat early. They were already casting off, the first mate hanging over the bow and the old man standing on the bridge cursing at him, when Philip arrived at the pier in a taxi. His armpits were not yet dry, his uniform was wrinkled, stained, and ill-smelling, his hair was matted under the no longer clean summer white hat, and his parched lips, on which he could feel some flakes of the girl's cosmetics, still tasted of her sleep- and brandy-swollen kisses. But as soon as he had stripped off his soiled blue jacket and rolled up the grimy cuffs of his white shirt he had to mount to the bridge, sore, damp, and sleepy, and see that the antennas were properly rigged, with the sun beating down mercilessly on his strained eyeballs; and then, covered with grease and his head ringing like a gong, he had to go into the radio shack and test the equipment. When he finally finished he tore off his clothes, fell on his bunk, and slept through dinner and the slow journey out of Brisbane harbor, awaking only in the middle of the night, the ship already at sea, and time for him to go on watch.

It was like that for the first week. The physical effects of the thirty-six hours he had spent locked in the hotel room with the tart wore off after a few cold showers and a few glasses of orange juice, except for a trembling at the knees when he made the long walk aft along the catwalk to the saloon at mealtime, and a dead sensation in the pit of his stomach when he raised his dark troubled head from his plate and looked at the greasy mouths of the intent diners in the saloon. But the other effects of Philip's private little orgy were far more persistent. Over and over he reviewed the

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details of the wild hours he had passed with the abandoned girl: at the most inopportune moments—when he was busy trying to raise Honolulu by short wave, when he stood under a cold shower with the tropical sun beating in through the open porthole, when he lay on his bunk slimed with sweat trying to read a paper-bound book of short stories—he smelled the girl's fevered flesh, or recalled her breasts swinging frantically above his face as she crouched over his recumbent torso, or felt the sweat-soaked, wrinkled bedsheets grating under his curled fingertips, or saw the empty brandy bottles rolling about, tangled in her torn stockings, on the speckled carpet.

Probably his most painful memory was the shameful recollection of the way he had whipped up his flagging appetites with the aid of the brandy and the violent and cunning connivance of the fantastically insatiable girl. He had regarded the episode at first as a duty he owed to his body, and then, while the febrile hours slid by in the half-darkened room, as something that had to run its predestined course, like a long and useless life. How his wife (when he wanted to be funny, he occasionally referred to her as "my current wife") would have wrinkled her nose in disgust! It was not the idea that he had been unfaithful to her that galled Phil—he had been going to sea too long for that—but the certainty of the scorn with which she would greet his depraved conduct, seated at her metal desk in the insurance company offices in Hartford. Phil recognized the fact that he was no longer very fond of his wife, and that his prolonged absences had made her less interesting to him, but he was as vulnerable as ever to her intimations of superiority, made on the basis of her regular attendance at concerts, her regular reading of advanced periodicals, and her association with what she liked to call "thoughtful" people. It was difficult to justify his mode of existence when his wife asserted that he enjoyed living with seamen because they were his intellectual inferiors, or that he continued to go to sea because it gave him an excuse to keep from "really doing anything." And now this . . .

The sun and the sea did their marvelous recuperative work. Sitting on the boat deck with his desk chair tilted against a bulkhead, full in the sun, Phil gazed through his dark glasses at the dully shining endless water stretching monotonously through

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space to the horizon. After a few days, he could step from the dark sweaty loneliness of the radio shack directly into the tropical sun, feeling with a hard delight the burning heat of the deck plates on his thin sneakers; easing himself slowly into the chair, his bare flesh crying out against the white sun, he could really open *A Tour to the Hebrides* and give himself over to it and to the sun, without having to stare fixedly, like an angry victim of tuberculosis, at the impersonal spectacle of nature surrounding him on all sides. And eventually, he could even begin to look about the ship itself and note the little changes that had taken place around him.

There were, for example, several men aboard the tanker who had not been there on the trip out from Panama. Two of these passengers who had boarded the ship in Brisbane ate in the saloon, although Phil did not see them there very often, since he usually got there almost at the end of the serving period, ate quickly, and left without stopping for a cigarette. One of them, who was obviously not a seafaring man, was a genuine puzzle: what was this fat middleaged man, self-consciously dressed in creased khakis, doing on a slow-moving tanker that rarely carried passengers? But when he finally accosted Phil one morning by the Number Two lifeboat, he turned out to be such an uninteresting fat man that Phil could not even bring himself to find out what he was doing aboard ship.

"You're the radio operator, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"How do you keep from going nuts? Always the same, day in and day out, week in and week out. You can't even see a movie. No variety, not a bit of variety."

"I like it." It was of course impossible to explain to the passenger that he had named precisely the things about sailing on the flat Pacific that Phil liked best. He picked up his book and began to read rudely, dismissing the man with the lowering of his eyelids.

The other passenger was something else. The first time that Phil really saw him he was jumping up and down on the catwalk. Phil felt the vibrations, perhaps; at any rate, he looked up, blinking away from Boswell, and saw a tall, excessively thin young man, wearing only (like himself) shorts and sneakers, skipping rope along the catwalk, his thin hairy arms flashing through the

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sunny air as he vaulted up and down, moving erratically astern along the steel walk like some great eccentric spider. Despite these unusual actions he looked as though he was somehow at home on a ship; but Phil took an immediate dislike to him.

For one thing, this leaping about with a piece of clothesline seemed an excessively familiar action for one who was aboard on sufferance, so to speak, and was not integrally concerned with the movement of the vessel on which he jumped. In addition, the passenger's skin was extraordinarily white, gleaming flatly like the belly of a leaping fish suddenly exposed to the sun; if he was a seafaring man, it was strange that here in the South Seas there should be no trace of sun on his long thin body. What was most annoying was the very idea of the exercise. It always seemed to Philip that there was something infinitely depressing about a grown man indulging in the pastimes of a child; and when the performance went on in public, as it did now, the exhibitionism and the arrogance implicit in such action were an affront.

If there was anything mystical about this swift dislike, it was strengthened early that evening when Henson, the third mate, and the only man aboard ship whose company Phil enjoyed, said to him, "Come into my stable, Phil. Eight days out and you haven't even shown your face yet."

"All right," Phil said. "In a few minutes."

There were three men in Henson's cabin when Phil walked in: Henson himself, Caputo, the Steward, and the tall passenger who had been skipping rope along the catwalk during the afternoon. Although the door was open wide and the porthole glass was hooked back against the overhead, there was little air in the room. All three men were smoking, and each one held a bottle of Panamanian beer; and since Henson slouched in his arm-chair, Caputo lay across the bunk, and the stranger sat on the settee, the room appeared unpleasantly crowded. Phil began to regret the sociable impulse that had drawn him down here, especially when he observed that all of the men were dressed only in shorts and slippers. Their skin was slick with a fine film of tropic sweat, and the cabin seemed to be filled with their heavy naked legs.

Henson handed Phil a bottle of beer and said, "I don't think you've met Bradley Holliday, Phil. Holliday, this is our radio man, Phil Stolz."

They shook hands.

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"Holliday's an engineer." Henson's round old face smiled blandly, his eyes roving, joke-making, behind oldfashioned steel-rimmed glasses. "But we let him up forward because he's got some new records. We're a very democratic ship."

Phil sat down on the settee next to Holliday, who smiled pleasantly at him and offered a cigarette. "Smoke, Sparks?"

"Thanks."

Holliday was losing his hair. His face was long, smiling, and polite; the balding skull gave his head just the needed touch of elegance, like a boutonniere. For without the gently receding hairline that made him look properly twenty-eight or thirty, there would have been something vulgar, something falsely genteel and cultivated, in his young American college man's expression. He gets away with it, Phil thought, looking down at the Rachmaninoff album that Holliday held across his bony knees. No doubt he was well liked by his shipmates and by men who met him casually, if they did not notice the self-satisfied glint that played across his otherwise ordinary face: it was the sure, arrogant gleam of a man who has always had his way with women, principally by choosing women who were his inferiors to the extent that they would be taken in by his youth and his looks alone—and now by his urbane, thin-haired maturity alone.

He in his turn glanced down at the bright yellow dustjacket of Phil's book and murmured, "I see you're a lover of fine books."

"I like to read." Philip hated the man, he was sure of it now, but he could not get up and leave, if only because Henson would be embarrassed.

"I don't care much for travel books," Holliday said. "I prefer poetry, like Carl Sandburg." He smiled around the cabin. "I'm a West Coast sailor myself, but Sandburg made me *feel* just what Chicago is like."

One poem, Phil said to himself, one poem in a stray anthology has made him an intellectual. The man's very name was an affront; Bradley Holliday indeed . . . it sounded like the hero in one of the *American Boy* stories that Phil had read every month in an agony of excitement and envy when he was thirteen: Brad Holliday, madcap leader of Dormitory B, Brad Holliday, ace goalie of Percival Prep, Bradley Holliday, bronzed lifeguard at Bide-A-While Summer Camp . . .

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Watching Holliday as he slipped the first record out of the album with long graceful fingers and placed it on the hand-winding victrola, Phil realized, in one of those sudden painful bursts of insight that bring one face to face with the condition of one's life, that if the man's name only betrayed a Jewish or a European origin one would feel compelled by one's sense of fairness not to condemn him without searching for the neurotic roots of his slippery and false manner; but a Bradley Holliday had to be held accountable for every overt expression of his essential vulgarity. Philip felt his spirit withdrawing from the room, leaving only his gross body seated next to Holliday, as the passenger tested the needle with his forefinger and said, "I hope you men enjoy this. I prefer Victor Herbert myself, but my girl is very fond of Rachmaninoff, so I bought her this album in Calcutta. After all, if you only have a limited number of records, this will be a change." He finished his beer and chuckled, "It's a long voyage home, as Eugene O'Neill once said."

Phil sat quietly through the recording, which happened to be excellent; the beer was not cold but cool, the ship pulsated quietly beneath the scratching needle, and when a touch of a breeze slipped in through the open porthole he could smell Holliday's pungent shaving lotion. At one point—Holliday was changing a record and saying something about the value of great music as a solace for lonely seamen—Henson's round and wrinkled eyelid drooped slowly behind the steelrimmed eyeglasses in an exaggerated wink. The gesture was almost enough to establish a community of dislike, and Phil relaxed a little on the settee.

The final notes of the Rachmaninoff concerto were still floating heedlessly out to sea on the tropical evening air as Henson heaved himself out of his chair and pulled on a pair of khaki trousers. "Almost eight," he said. "I'm due on the bridge. But stay," he gestured hospitably, "stay right where you are. I never lock my valuables."

Philip arose. "I want to get a few hours sleep before I go on watch."

Holliday glanced at him curiously. "Don't you keep a day watch?"

"I prefer to split the hours. I enjoy the quiet at night, and the reception is usually better."

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"I wonder . . ." Holliday looked down uncertainly at the book that Phil held in his hand, apparently unable to formulate a transitional statement that would smoothly bridge the gap between his feelings and his expectations. "Do you think it would be all right . . ." Once again he hesitated, and at that instant, that moment of honest uncertainty, his real charm, natural and unforced, shone through his false exterior. It seemed to Philip that whereas all too many people were cloying and over-confidential when their guard was down, men like Holliday could only be more likeable in their moments of revelatory weakness. He smiled encouragingly, and Holliday destroyed everything by saying, "I don't often get the chance to talk with a man who enjoys good reading. You're a college graduate, aren't you?"

How false he rang after his little moment of sincerity! Philip replied coldly, "I had two years at Tufts once."

"Would it be all right if I came up to the shack some time, just to shoot the breeze for a while?"

"The old man doesn't want visitors in the shack, especially during watchkeeping hours. The best time to stop in is during my night watch, when he's asleep." Why didn't he lie? He could have insisted that no one ever entered the radio shack. Holliday's very irresoluteness, his sudden uncertainty, had wrung from him this grudging invitation.

Holliday was once again in command of the situation. "That's very white of you, Sparks. I'll drop up real soon, and we'll have a good long talk. I'm sure we'll find that we have a lot in common."

Thus dismissed, Phil retreated in some confusion, tripping over the mat in Henson's doorway as he stepped out to the passageway.

Shortly after Philip went on watch that evening the third mate stepped into the shack on his way down from the wheelhouse. "I'm going to examine the night lunch," he said. "Can I bring you a sandwich?"

Phil shook his head. "No. What's the story on the passenger?"

Henson smiled slowly. "Holliday? You don't like him, do you?"

"Not much. He's a phoney, Henson."

"I wouldn't put it that strongly. There's some good in the worst—"

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"He skips rope."

Henson laughed. "Christ, Phil, if you're looking for gossip . . . He's been passing himself off on the black gang as a First Assistant Engineer—he even hinted that he sailed Chief during the war. But I've seen his license, you know. The man's only a Third Assistant."

"That's typical." Phil looked up angrily. "Isn't it typical, Henson?"

"You're pretty hard on him. I think Holliday is a very likeable fellow, and a damn sight more intelligent than the average engineer. I've seen more of him than you have this past week, and I find him good company. If I had his trouble, I doubt if I'd be so even-tempered and cheerful."

"What's his trouble?"

"He's got syphilis."

"Are you sure?"

Henson waved his hand tiredly through the hot breathless air. As he reached up to remove his steelrimmed glasses he blinked; without the glasses he looked old and worn. Philip felt ashamed, looking at him like this.

"You know that fat passenger?"

"Yes."

"He's a company doctor going home on leave. He's been treating Holliday, trying to keep things under control until we dump him at Pearl, or Pedro. That's why we couldn't sign Holliday on as a workaway back in Brisbane. He isn't fit to stand a watch, so the company decided to give him a break and a free ride home. After all, he's been riding their tankers for a good many years. And Phil . . ."

"Yes?"

"If the company can afford to be charitable, why can't you? Sometimes you tend to judge people as though they were on trial. I'm not complaining about that," he added hastily, warding off Philip's protestations with his outspread hand. "That's your privilege. But can't you take into account the suffering that people have undergone when you pass judgment? Suppose that Holliday talked this way about you—wouldn't you want him to make an effort to understand you before he shot off his mouth?"

"I don't—" Phil checked himself. Suddenly he saw Holliday

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as he had been that afternoon, his thin, sick body clothed only in khaki shorts, cavorting about on the catwalk, trying to *build himself up,* trying to *soak up sunshine.* "What about his girl? The one he bought the Rack-man-inoff records for?"

"Are you being cruel?"

Phil flushed. "No. I'm curious."

"And I'm a cynic." Henson lifted his shoulder wearily. He moved slowly to the door. "For all I know, she gave him the chancre as a going-away present, before he left home . . ."

Phil sat until four o'clock in the morning in his iron and concrete room, listening to the throbbing heartbeat of the ship, choked and muffled as though it were slowly strangling in the warm Pacific, and listening occasionally to the plaintive chirping of other ships far away, which sounded as though they had settled only momentarily, like some strange and frightened birds, on the bosom of the southern sea. Conscientiously he noted what they had to say in his log, but their weak cries were no different on this white and star-filled night from what they had been or would be on any other such night. The peace and terror of the world, a thousand miles from the nearest thrust of rock, were such that it was almost an impiety to listen to other voices when one floated godlike and alone.

But *What do you do with all your time?* his wife had to ask him when they lay in bed. 'Some men paint watercolors of the sea, Joseph Conrad even wrote great novels about it, but you don't even seem to be able to keep up with your reading.' *Keep up,* indeed. How could one possibly explain that he floated alone, like this, in order that it should not be demanded of him that he keep up? If the noblest human achievements could not compete with the annihilating force of the marine sun and moon on one's lowered eyelids, why should one even attempt to struggle against a surrender to the timeless bronze days and the white silent nights?

He no longer maintained the pretense of holding a book before him on the desk while he sat half-listening to the little voices of the distant ships. It was in these hours that he knew his own life and its ugliness as no artist could possibly reveal it to him, simply by extending his palm (which had participated in the countless brutalities he had committed in common with all the rest of

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humanity) and feeling, along its coarse surface, the velvety breath of this pure and unpeopled night. Shortly before dawn he could rouse himself and type *Off Watch on 500 KC,* leaving the swivel chair and the radio which committed him to the reactionary necessity of facing in the direction from which he had come.

He customarily slept out on deck, on an army cot which he had borrowed from the sick bay. Tonight he lowered himself quietly to the cot, slipped off his sneakers, loosened his shorts, and stretched himself out at full length beneath the white and blue brilliance of the stars. There, on the slowly rocking sliver of cooling metal, his eyes bathed in an effulgence so brillant that he had finally to blot it from his vision, Phil felt the very essence of his being stirring itself slowly, uncoiling and rising to the very heights for which it had striven unsuccessfully for thirty years . . .

The next day Holliday did not present himself on deck with his skipping rope, and Philip felt obscurely grateful, as though there had been some unspoken understanding between them in the final moments of their meeting in Henson's cabin the night before, as though Holliday had agreed: if you don't hate me any more, Sparks, I won't exercise in public any more.

They did not, in fact, meet at all during the day, and Phil went about his marvelously monotonous routine: breakfast with the captain and his sullen Swedish jokes about things that had probably not happened aboard a windjammer in 1911; shaving before the unrevealing mirror, the disc of the sun once again driving heat before it like a searing knife through the portholes; inspection of the massive batteries oozing sulphuric acid; the specially cold water of the shower stall dripping continuously behind all the other noises on this deck; the colorless hot iron of the ship itself as he made his way aft once again to the saloon where the engineers and deck officers, their chins sweating, fattened themselves on hot food and loud lying memories of their nights in Noumea and Brisbane.

This same, same routine, hour following hour like the endless plash plash of blue water slapping the plates of the ship, was as soothing to Phil as a compress laid across his dry burning eyes. While he sat and baked, Boswell hanging laxly from his sweating hand, he could watch the first mate standing at the clothesline

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on deck below him, tying up his dripping white socks and shorts; he could watch the arc of the sky, curving like a concave plate-glass window to meet the pale shining body of the sea. The sun, suspended behind the arching sky as though it hung in a clear curved window, sparkled coolly as always on the wetly glistening sea; but against his bare wet brown flesh it felt as though it were being focussed through a burning glass. He squirmed about in a slow agony of pleasure, observing his skin browning through the dark glasses while rancor oozed like sweat out of his pores. Yes, while he broiled in the equatorial blaze, shifting now and again to match the slow swing of the day, he grew certain that every mean deed—the rotten fornications, the small hatreds and puny envies, the inconsequential and fruitless marriages—all were being baked out of his interior being; if he were ever again to touch land, he would return to combat renewed and whole.

By evening the recuperative process had advanced so far that Phil could regard even Bradley Holliday with a kind of benevolent neutrality. He awoke from an evening's slumber in time for a cold shower and a beef sandwich; it was midnight and time for him once again to go on watch.

And once again he sat facing Australia, facing the slate-grey radio panels with their eye-like dials that kept him, literally, in touch with the other little vessels sliding along the surface of the southern sea—an island, two islands, three islands away. *Wiper age 39, cramps lower rt. qdrt., pse adv med.* . . . The plaintive little calls of the distant ships, flutey and disembodied in the rich velvet-black air, served only to lull him further away from the reality of their thread-connected world.

It was with some surprise, therefore, that Phil looked up from the deep green of his desk, and saw Bradley Holliday standing in the doorway. He must have made some slight gesture in order to attract Phil's attention, perhaps he merely coughed; in any event, he was carrying a tall bottle of Bols gin with two glasses, a folded leather case the size of a notebook, and a bulky folder wrapped in manila paper.

"I'm not intruding, am I?" Holliday looked serious, and even—aided by his impressive paraphernalia — purposeful. "You suggested—"

"Come in. Take my sneakers off the chair and sit down."

"Thanks." Holliday did as as he was told, then held the gin

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bottle critically up to the light. "You don't have any scruples about drinking on watch, do you, Sparks?"

"This is a free and easy ship."

"So I've noticed. I go up on the bridge every afternoon to chew the fat with the second mate, and the old man hasn't kicked me down below yet. That's remarkable in itself."

"I suppose so."

"You've got a good feeding ship too—the steward is an all right guy. As a matter of fact, I persuaded him to give me—" he unbuttoned his khaki shirt and drew forth a bottle of Australian lemon juice, "—a quart of this stuff from the freezer. Makes the gin more palatable, you know. Say when."

Phil indicated the correct level with his forefinger as Holliday decanted the bottle, then placed it on the desk before the little set of radio manuals and Penguin books and leaned back gingerly in his chair as though he were still unsure of his welcome.

"But no matter how good . . ." He stopped, moistened his lips, and then said determinedly, "It really doesn't matter whether you're on a happy ship or not if you have a serious problem. There's something about being at sea that cuts you off psychologically from the ordinary solutions. If you come up against something that you can't find an answer for by yourself, then you're stuck. You're really stuck."

Philip looked at him in surprise. Just as he thought he had Holliday properly pigeonholed, the man popped out of place, insisting on his claim to individuality.

"It doesn't make any difference what the size of the crew is either, whether it's forty-five, or fifty, or a hundred and fifty. The point is that although they're your shipmates, they're still not the people you'd voluntarily choose for friends. It's sheer luck if you find just one person you can talk to. That's why I've come up here tonight."

The earphones which Phil wore looped around his throat like a primitive necklace seemed to have grown suddenly both heavy and loud; would Holliday feel that it was rude of him to go on wearing them? He lowered their volume and suspended them from one of the knobs of the short-wave receiver where they swung like a gift offering, squawking faintly. If Holliday wanted to, he could accept the gesture as an invitation to proceed.

"Frankly," Holliday said warmly, "I felt that you were the

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kind of person I could talk to. Perhaps it sounds silly, but I believe that college men and people who like good books in general are usually more understanding than uncultured people. I studied engineering at U.C.L.A. for a while, until my dad's money ran out, and I appreciate the difference between people who are *simpatico,* like yourself, from having really made an effort to appreciate the finer things, and people who simply don't care."

This appeal to Philip's superior sensibility was gratifying, even though it drifted off into the No Man's Land between sincerity and insincerity that was seemingly so congenial to the passenger. Phil had raised his hand protestingly during Holliday's short oration; now he dropped it as the statement was brought to a close and Holliday handed him a glass. "Here's looking at you, Sparks."

Phil gulped at the concoction, glancing uneasily over the rim of the glass at his drinking companion. If Holliday wanted to be regarded as an intelligent individual, and not as a clod, he would not hasten to insist upon Phil's listening to his confidences. Or would he begin by being a little reticent, simply because his conception of the cultivated young man included a modicum of reserve as standard equipment? Phil set down his glass as Holliday unwrapped the manila bundle and straightened the leather case.

"I've been having a bit of trouble with my girl," Holliday said, in a more casual tone. "You know how it is when you're out on one of these Pacific runs. There's so much time to think things over that you don't take anything for granted. Are you married, Sparks?"

Phil nodded, but did not volunteer any information. It was one thing for this man to walk into the room with his personal troubles in his pocket, ready to be uncorked and poured like gin; but there was no reason for Phil himself to counter with Natalie, as though the calculated wifely hypocrisy which he suffered from her could somehow cancel out Holliday's difficulties. Holliday however seemed content to accept the nod as Phil's contribution to their mutual understanding.

"Then you'll see my problem that much more clearly." He unfolded the leather case and stood it on end, like an open book, facing Phil. It contained a kodachrome photograph of a

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girl who smiled directly out of the picture at him. "This is Phyllis. I though I'd set the scene for you a little, so to speak, if I brought her picture along so you could see what she looks like. Attractive, isn't she?"

The picture, embossed with the label of a prominent Hollywood photographer, was of a girl in her twenties, no longer flushed with youth, but still fresh and piquant. Her Norse cheekbones, slanting tautly towards the little creases of her neat ears, were thrown into relief by the smile, which was not the cajoled grimace of an ordinary portrait. There was a wistfulness in the slight arch of her back-flung neck and in the pouting curve of her full parted lips that was reminiscent of the wholehearted tenderness possessed by a few girls whom Phil had known. Even her oval eyes, slanting upwards and paralleling the line of her cheekbones, looked out at him with a special recognition, as though he were as familiar to her as an old story or a well-remembered piece of music. Only her hair was uninteresting; it was set in conventional curls mounted towards the front of her head, as though she could not—dared not—make the final gesture that would set her apart from all the other girls of her world, as though finally she had to cling, to capitulate in this little way to its demands.

Everything that the photograph revealed about this girl, yes, even her hair, was infinitely touching to Phil: the tender, sensitive countenance was moderately intelligent, but achingly anxious of acquiring, by conquest or by absorption, a greater intelligence, and Phil paid her the tribute of turning to the man who claimed her and saying, "She's really lovely."

"Isn't she?" Bradley Holliday smiled gratefully. "She's just that good in bed too. Sensational." His smile broadened but did not become vulgar. "I know I can speak frankly to you, Sparks. A lot of sailors would blow their corks if I said anything like that to them. Once you sleep with a girl you're not supposed to have any respect for her, unless she's your wife; and then you can't ever mention the fact that you lay her. The whole world is divided into the whores that you bang and the women you love. Some of these smart apples brag to me—they actually brag!—that they've never seen their wives with their clothes off. With people like that it's useless to talk.

"But my problem is a little more complicated than anything

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those sailors ever encountered. For one thing, Phyllis is after me to marry her and I'm damned if I know what to do. Sometimes I think, go ahead, marry her. One of these days you may hit the beach and find her married to someone else. And then I say to myself, why look for trouble? She's got a nice apartment and a comfortable bed. Everything is fine as long as I come and go when I please. How do I know what will happen after we get married? Supposing I discover that we're not compatible after all?"

It was really absurd. Philip had posed the same unreal questions to himself when he married Grace, and again when he met Natalie, and he had been unable to answer them sensibly. How then could he answer them now, when they were asked by a man who was not even aware of the meaning of the words that he used?

But apparently Holliday did not expect an answer. "I took the liberty—" he said quietly, as he opened the manila folder and drew forth a packet tied with string, "—of bringing along Phyl's letters, the ones she's written me since I left on the last voyage. If I may—"

"Whose letters?"

"Phyl." Holiday inclined his head toward the picture. "My fiancee."

"You startled me. That's my name too, you know."

"Oh, is it? I'm afraid I didn't catch it when we were introduced. What did you say your last name was?"

"Stolz." Phil hesitated for an instant. "That means 'proud' or 'pride' in German," he added, and hated himself as soon as the words were out. What a horror, he thought agitatedly, what a lurking horror to know that the hateful need of "justifying" one's very name lay always hidden in ambush, like an ugly beast, ready to leap forth snarling whenever identification was demanded.

Holliday did not seem to notice Philip's perturbation. He turned over the tied bundle of letters with curious caution, as though he were examining a stack of new banknotes. "Would it be too much of an imposition—" he glanced up warily, as if to say *We* know that I'm not worried about it being an imposition, "—if I were to read some of Phyl's letters to you now?"

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But if he had come to the radio room simply to read the letters, why did he bother to ask permission? Was it possible that he was troubled by pangs of conscience, that he desired simple masculine approval for what might otherwise be considered a betrayal of confidence?

Phil said, "I'm perfectly willing to listen. But do you think—"

"Oh, I know!" Holliday cried, almost gaily. "You're afraid that Phyl might be offended. But she's not that type, not at all. In fact, I think she'd be rather pleased about my reading some passages to you. You'll see what I mean; some of her letters sound as though she'd written them for an audience, instead of just for me."

Phil studied the girl's photograph. It was possible, wasn't it, that Holliday was right, that this girl, with her determined brows and her smiling but fervent eyes, was fully capable of a public utterance of her feelings. . . . Or was he being swayed, as Phyllis very likely had been, by Holliday's insolent charm?

Holliday clinched it by saying calmly, "Phyllis works for an advertising agency. Unfortunately, she takes it seriously, so . . ." His shrug was both worldly and cynical.

Phil felt baffled and powerless. Even if he too were to shrug in reply, the graceless motion of his shoulders could hardly compete with Holliday's eloquent gesture. But before the silence could become awkward, Holliday had snapped the string and begun to read the topmost letter.

"*Darling Brad, just a few hours since you've left*—this was last May—*and yet everything seems different. Isn't it odd how you can go on doing the same things, and yet feel that all meaning has been sucked out of them, merely by virtue of one person's departure from your life? The egg that was so juicy and tempting suddenly becomes an Easter egg, gaily colored still, but hollow and empty on the inside . . .*"

So this was the prose that she had polished for Holliday and his chance acquaintances. Phil looked at the girl's picture with compassion and contempt. If she had entrusted her private dreams to Holliday, she had no one to blame but herself for what became of them.

" . . . *of course, I can hear you saying, isn't it foolish of her to sit down and write to me when I've just left, and she hasn't any news for me? But darling, I only want to tell you that sud-*

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denly I understand how it is that there won't be any news, not any at all, until you come back. The job isn't going to have any flavor, even the apartment that I've been so proud of because you've been so comfortable here . . ."

Phil knew now that he was going to have to listen to the entire series of letters. He reached for the bottle and poured two more drinks. It was the first liquor he had tasted since the final night with the girl at Lennons Hotel, but it aroused only pictorial memories of that scene as it trickled warmly down his throat. This was going to be one of those occasions when he would remain sober, seeing everything with a cold and painful clarity, no matter how much he drank. Holliday, already absorbed in presenting the evidence of his manhood, gulped absently at the gin, drew forth another letter, and cleared his throat.

"*Darling Brad,*" he read, "*here goes another letter off into space. I sometimes think that the worst thing about separation is this hollow routine of sending off a whole series of letters before I can even hope for a single answer. But then that's not your fault, is it? If I had been shrewd and calculating I would have tied in with a junior executive type who would be here for dinner every evening at six thirty sharp, instead of with a sea-going engineer. Perhaps things will be different when you return from this voyage* . . . dot, dot, dot," Holliday said. "She puts three dots here, after voyage. That's a little habit of hers."

Phil nodded ambiguously. Was it really possible that with hardly anything more to go on than three dots (and God alone knew what they signified to Holliday) he could begin to construct for himself a portrait of the girl, not contradicting, but only paralleling the portrait that stood before him on the desk? Yet it was already apparent to him that she was a proud and spirited person, conforming a little more to the highly developed type of the young American college graduate than she would have liked to admit, deluding herself that she was more flattered when the Hollidays admired her intellect then when they paid homage to her physical attributes.

"*. . . so that by the time I got home I was really too worn out to curl up on the studio couch with a box of stationery and write you all about the concert, as I really wanted to. Anyway, Serkin was simply magnificent, at the top of his form, and I wanted to*

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cry—I would have cried—during that wrenching, indescribable slow movement, if only it had been you sitting next to me instead of Doris. That's the girl she shares the apartment with. *But I couldn't very well hold Doris's hand, could I, dear? . . . the result is that I'm stealing company time to write to you, and even, as you can see only too plainly, company paper. The folder that I'm supposed to be working up on California lettuce just doesn't seem particularly intriguing to me now, especially when I think of you making for those sloe-eyed Oriental maidens. Tell me, Brad, are they really sloe-eyed?"* Holliday paused and cocked an eye at Phil. "She's being eu-pha-mistic, you know," he explained.

Phil did not answer. The badly pronounced interpolation was doubly offensive; he was just beginning to feel like an omniscient author who is presented the facts of the case by a nervous shipboard acquaintance. This pleasurable certainty that he was being given a series of facts, some essential and some peripheral, whose significance as fiction he would determine for himself at his leisure, was badly shaken by the engineer's self-interruption. In a sense it recalled him to a gross reality that had been gratefully diminishing during the reading of the first few letters. He looked up from the scratch pad (on which he had been abstractedly jotting the weather report of a distant freighter as it cheeped from the earphones before him, high above Holliday's voice), intending to say "Please go on reading," or something of the sort, but en route to Holliday his eyes met the girl's, smiling warningly at him from the picture frame, and suddenly he understood that he and Phyllis had become friends. Was she as much of a friend as an author's newly developing character? More, perhaps, for with any luck at all he would now learn from her own pen, aided by his own retrospective surmises, those things which an author is never quite able to construct; and as he moved towards an identification so absolute that it emboldened him to forecast the entire course of the correspondence, he was gladdened by a sense of his own power and insight surely surpassing, he thought, even the vision of a skilled and inventive writer. He leaned forward eagerly to hear the ardent beginning of a new series of letters.

Holiday smoothed the sheets over his bare hairy knees. "*My own darling,*" he read, with an odd kind of detached fervor, like

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an actor reading for an audition, "*it's a week today that you're gone, a week torn out of my life, as useless and meaningless as the seven empty sheets of the calendar that I crumple up and throw away. It's just impossible to write you a chatty letter about Doris or the new slip covers or what the supervisor said to me yesterday or those brutal cramps that started up this morning. I can't, Bradley, because I am sick from thinking about you and about how I love your slow, hard smile and the way you smoke in bed with your arms clasped behind your head and the cigarette dangling down towards your chest and the smoke curling over your face . . .*"

Philip felt himself flushing. But Holliday, pausing only to replenish his glass, continued to read in an impersonal monotone, his voice gradually thickening as the gin slurred down his throat.

"*. . . one thing I can't discuss with Doris, even tho' she sleeps in the next room and is closer to me than anyone in the world but you. Precisely because she's always slept alone, how could she know anything of that sickening loneliness on a Sunday morning in May? No one else could know the way it was when you and I lay here watching the sun sneak through the long window and crawl across the foot of the bed, while E. Power Biggs blasted away majestically at the organ all the way across the country, and we sipped coffee and listened to Bach and got ready to make love . . .*" Holliday flipped open his Zippo lighter with a metallic snap and lighted a fresh cigarette, then went on: "*. . . that dreadful thrashing about, which is at bottom I suppose the fear that everything is lost and irrevocably in the past. And then . . . la recherche du temps—*" He pronounced the word *temps* as though it were *Thames.*

Philip broke in furiously, "You're pronouncing it wrong!"

"That's possible." Holliday nodded equably. "My French is pretty poor—although I've never had any trouble making myself understood by the babes in Marseille. It's different with Phyl. She takes it as a personal affront every time I mispronounce a word."

It was fantastic. By admitting his inadequacy, Holliday succeeded in representing himself as a simple, straightforward fellow; while Phyllis became, to just that extent, the snob and the fake. But was that completely false? Didn't Phyllis reveal herself in her

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letters as a girl driven by anxiety and ambition to the kind of extreme attitudes that would entitle her lover to smile patronizingly, secure in the knowledge that he was by comparison more unassuming and more honest?

Holliday however could not rest content with having planted these seeds of doubt in his listener's mind; he had to add, "Phyl claims that she prefers French movies to Hollywood movies. I think it's just an affectation. We have to sit through all those arty movies instead of being able to see a decent show, in order that she can discuss them afterwards with her intellectual friends. Let me read on a bit—you'll see what I mean."

As Holliday read on, the all too familiar words, *anguish, love, the hideous power of loneliness, the memory of you lying beside me in the dark,* falling dully from his lips like tarnished stones, Phil asked himself: Why did I become angry? Why should I care how he pronounces her words?

The answer lay not so much in Holliday as it did in the girl, and in Philip's own attitude towards her. It was no longer possible for him to maintain the pose of the detached author, to listen to these revelations with the keen hopefulness of one who would hasten to note his impressions in his journal upon the conclusion of the reading. For he knew the girl too well already, and any further display of the literary efforts and the borrowed French phrases with which she exposed herself to this coarse man reflected less on Holliday than it did on her, or even on Phil himself. The truth was—one of the truths was—that the more she was a type and the less an individual the more she resembled the long train of ambitious and intense young women with whom Phil had involved himself in these last ten years.

Something very strange was happening. It wasn't even necessary for him to regard her taut cheekbones, or her serious and sensuous mouth, in order to visualize her in any number of "honest" poses: listening to a Horowitz recording, semi-recumbent on a studio couch in her stockinged feet, her paired shoes standing neatly on the rug; leaning forward in a hard undertaker's chair at a protest meeting for Spain, or Czechoslovakia, or Greece, or Palestine, her chin cupped firmly in her large white hand and her hair tied back behind her ears; lounging in an arm chair with him, running her fingers easily through his hair and teasing him

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with a little private dirty joke about the similarity of their names, her legs lying fluidly athwart his lap while he plucked at the nylon hose, feeling the close grain of her neatly shaved shins under his thumb, and thinking cloudily of how it would be when he moved his hands upwards under her clothing to undefended smoother places. He shuddered . . .

Meanwhile Holliday was reading: ". . . *as though I could burst when the crescendo swells through the room. Brahms appeals to the adolescent in me, my darling, just as Thomas Wolfe would appeal to the adolescent in you.*" Holliday flicked at the letter with his long index finger. "Phyl thinks there's something of me in Wolfe. Or vice versa. She's a great one for literary allusions—is that the expression? Here, for example, she says: "*I must quote you a few lines from Jean Stafford's lovely first novel, which I am belatedly reading. Miss Pride, a crusty old spinster, like me, is . . .*"

Phil looked at him in horror. You son of a bitch, he thought, you're reading my mail. Who do you think would write you letters like that? How dare you open my mail? Phyllis is my kind of girl, he wanted to cry out. He knew it, not only because she was so obviously not Holliday's kind, but also because everything about her was so familiar. These letters were the sort he had been receiving for years. Why, even Natalie had written to him like this before the game had palled on her. He could have predicted, if Holliday had asked him, that presently Phyllis's pride and frustration would fuse into an irritated analysis of what she now began to call "our relationship."

"*Our relationship,*" Holliday read stolidly (if they only knew, Phil thought, how I despise those stale words!), "*can only be understood when we're separated. Because it's true, isn't it, my dear, that our mutual sexual attraction blurs the edges of all the sharp and strong reasons for our remaining separated? Any rational attempt to explain what we mean to each other has to start from the premise that . . .*"

As Holliday droned on, violating every rule of privacy and good taste, Phil felt himself shrinking down into his chair, embarrassed for Phyl by what she was saying to him, the way she was saying it, and the intermediary who was intercepting her letters to him. Ah, Phyl, Phyl, he thought, everything you're going to

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tell me has been told to me before; why must you persist in spelling it out, why must you delude yourself into believing that you are saying something profound, or acute, or even especially intelligent? He looked at her picture again. She still looked as bright and as pretty, in her wistful and touching way, as she had when Bradley Holliday had first placed the photo on the desk; but now Phil sensed another quality in her taut and sharp-boned face that he had not seen before when he looked into her full, piquant smile: it was a special kind of ambition, the ambition to achieve sexual dominance and psychic mastery peculiar to educated American women. But your aggressive ambition, my love, he said silently to the photograph, is really nothing more than fear. You can disguise it with tough second-hand phrases about—he heard Holliday mouthing the words—*personality differences* and *clashes of interest* and *areas of incompatibility*, but behind this tangled shrubbery of pseudo-technical jargon there lies still the cold sweating body of fear. And that's why, in the end, after you have bravely attempted to talk away the salty terror, the awful certainty that the final decision: to quit or not to quit? lies not in your hands, but in mine, then you will capitulate. Yes, you will capitulate. Because you know what it means, you and all the other girls like you that I have known so well, to be past twenty-five and to feel in the very marrow of your bones that there will no longer be an infinite number of Philip Stolzes, or even Bradley Hollidays, for you to meet, with a shivery foretaste of excitement, at a party, on a bus, or even in your imagination. It is this knowledge that breeds the bitter rebellion, and yet also enforces the ultimate capitulation. I know, Phyl, he told the picture, because it was my profile that graced the other side of the coin in the bedroom in Brisbane; heads or tails, we all proceed, protest though we may, to be melted down together in the same final furnace.

Holliday was drinking from the bottle now. He wiped his lips carefully with a clean white handkerchief and said shrewdly, "You know where she gets this analytical business—it's her job. That advertising agency pays her sixty bucks a week for what they call market research. Women are all the same, aren't they? Instead of forgetting about the job when she gets home, she has to sit down and write up a report on the status of her love-

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life." He stared cunningly at the photograph. "You don't fool me, baby. I don't impress as easily as you think, not even when I'm all alone in the middle of noplace, and sick, and—" Turning back to Phil, he said lightly, "She doesn't pull any of that stuff when we're alone together. She may indulge herself in public, it's true, but never in the bedroom."

Well, wasn't it true of himself too? There was no reason for him to feel superior, no reason to hate this man who was so like himself, when he too had more than once been rendered cynical by the instantaneous reflection that what caused a girl's eyeballs to roll upwards, her toes to crisp, her fingers to scrape against his flesh, was something other than an intense satisfaction at the discovery of common intellectual interests.

"Watch how her mood changes now," Holliday said confidentially, like a mechanic explaining the workings of an engine. "This one is dated the twelfth of June, before she got my first batch of letters. *My very very dear Brad,* she says, *Still no word from you, and I begin to wonder if I shall ever open another one of your exotic envelopes. I feel obliged to tell you, prompted by the special kind of honesty that we have saved for each other, darling, that it might be better for us both if I were never to receive another letter from you.*"

"What a special kind of dishonesty!" Phil murmured aloud.

"What?"

"Nothing." He ducked his head, as if to listen to the earphones, and scrawled a few words on the pad before him. "Go ahead."

"*. . . another letter from you. There are two reasons for this feeling, which strengthens day by day. First is the very strong suspicion that we would both be too cowardly to ever bring things to an end face to face—perhaps if our love must end, it would be better for it to peter out in unwritten letters . . . And I must admit, darling, that the letters I have received from you during your previous absences have not been such to set me aflame with desire for you . . .*"

"I'm not that kind of a person." Surprisingly, the reading of these words had put Holliday a little on the defensive. He took another drink and coughed quietly, like an after-dinner speaker, preliminary to going on with his explanation. "I could never sit down and say all those things. It's a woman's place . . . Besides, how did I ever know if I'd be writing the truth? If I never

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really knew how I felt, how could I let go with a lot of romantic . . ."

Philip felt closer to his enemy than he had at any time since their first meeting. If Phyl was going to be "victorious" by capitulating, the temporary dishonesty of her pleading was forcing Holliday into the same kind of virtuous refusal to commit himself that Philip had always prided himself upon. This demonstration of honorable male solidarity was so unexpected that Phil did not not know quite how to react.

He listened with dismay as Phyl gave herself away in this series of letters written in the month of June, growing more vituperative as her desperation increased. How terrible that she could not find it in herself to maintain the minimal dignity of silence! But no, here aboard the tanker that slid along the surface of the black warm sea at three o'clock in the morning, Holliday, perceptibly drunk by now, went on relentlessly reading aloud from this serialized chronicle of guilt and shame.

"*Was I a girlish fool to have expected that mere exposure to the books I liked, to the people whom I call my friends, to the music that is so important to me, would alter the ingrained attitude of vulgar mockery and lowbrow disdain that seems more important to you than any affection? . . . Shouldn't I have known, Bradley, from your first stilted, insincere letters, that you would fall asleep at a chamber music recital, and that on the way home you would attempt to justify yourself by impugning the sincerity of my appreciation of the music?*"

Holliday looked up from the letter, his mouth twisted. "She doesn't mention how we made up when we got to her house that night. Funny, isn't it, the way they can forget the things that really count? Then she says, *Shouldn't I have known that you would seize the first opportunity to sneer at my dearest friend, the girl with whom I live, the girl whose hospitality you have accepted on so many occasions?* That's Doris Fleischman, her roommate. She's got a beak sharper than the bow of this ship."

Phil cringed. The hackles of terror rose tremblingly, his fingers suddenly began to drum senselessly against the green table, and he had to blink to clear the film from his eyeballs. All of the old taunting phrases came surging into his gullet like vomit. And Holliday was saying:

"All I said to Phyl was that Doris ought to get her nose bobbed

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if she really wanted a man. I wouldn't have said it to her face, Phyl knows that, and she didn't hear us, because she was out in the kitchen mixing drinks. Dor isn't a bad sort—for a Jew. She even baked some brownies once and mailed them out to me. But that's no reason to live with one, is it?"

So once again he was accepted into the community of Gentiles. What could be more humiliating than the knowledge that he was too cowardly to become enraged, that secretly he was pleased at what should have disgusted him. . . . Yes, he was pleased that this weak, sick, vulgar man, this personification of everything that he despised, had casually included him in his world; by its very nature, the compliment excluded even the possibility of his protesting. He lowered his head to the table, his forehead resting on his slowly sweating forearm, thinking that perhaps he might cry; but it was too long since he had indulged himself in the feminine pleasure, even the dry sobs of self-pity would not come, and he was forced to sit quietly with his face rubbed in his own sweat while his faithful antagonist read aloud from the pathetic diary of their mutual mistress.

"*. . . seven of them, all at once! I was such a child, darling, I lined them up on the rug and plopped down on my stomach and fondled them, making sure that I would read them in the order in which you had written them. Such wonderful letters!*

"*Have I been terribly foolish, sweetheart? If I could have only one wish granted, I would wish with all my heart that the letters I have written you could disappear before they reached your hand. Did I really say that I couldn't possibly love anyone who didn't care for the Emperor Concerto? You're going to have to try very hard to forgive me for all the snobbish nonsense that I've been inflicting on you in these last few weeks. But pride feeds on loneliness, I guess. All I can promise you is that when you finally return to me I will know how to make you forget the cruel and stupid things I have been writing. I wouldn't care if you never wanted to go to another concert with me again, as long as you still wanted to be with me, Bradley. We have been so happy, and we will be happy again. I know it in my bones, just as I know that all of our superficial differences are not central to the one new person that both of us merge into when we are really alone together . . .*"

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Above, on the night-wrapped bridge, the ship's bell tinkled seven times. It was half past three. This was the blackest hour of all. In another hour, perhaps two, dawn would come sneaking over the horizon like a sob. Holliday was still reciting the final chapter of the girl's capitulation; the ugly desperate lies knocked against Philip's ear with the flat finality of a radio announcer's description of doom. If only Holliday would accept her, how quickly Phyllis would prove that she meant what she said! How quickly the pot roasts and the babies would replace the anxious insistence upon an immediate acquaintance with the critically certified! You will put them off, Phyl, he thought tiredly, first the concerts, and then the plays, and at last the books. And in a few years you will content yourself with the intellectual luxury of a Saturday matinee while Bradley is out golfing—perhaps you will be able to slip off your shoes midway through the first act, to ease your swelling feet and your shrivelling soul. . . .

He looked up from the green linoleum into Holliday's bleak eyes. The Bols was almost empty; in the sudden silence he could see, he could almost hear the last few ounces of gin stirring gently in the bottom of the bottle, quickened by the soft vibrations of the ship's engines.

Now was the time for confidences and revelations. In this final hour before dawn, Holliday doubtless expected to receive advice and sustenance that would enable him to adopt an unfaltering attitude toward Phyllis. But his hands trembled as he slid her picture carelessly into the manila folder with all of her letters, so that her exquisite face, composite of all the best of Philip's girls, was pressed against her own truths and her own lies. Was there a light fragrance hanging in the air above the manila folder, a mild fresh scent emanating from the lonely letters of May, the bitter letters of June, the tear-drenched letters of July, that had outlasted the briny air in which they must have been handled so much?

Holliday, falsely casual, gathered together his liquor and his letters and rose to his feet. He wavered, belched, smiled an apology behind the back of his hand, but said nothing. Wasn't he going to ask any questions? Could he dare to believe that everything explained itself? You rotten coward, Phil muttered, staring

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malevolently at Holliday's naked bony feet that jutted from his sandals as they slapped across the room, you dirty rotten coward. Then he noticed that Holliday was still trembling involuntarily, as a tree moves when it is shaken by a slow steady soundless wind. It reminded Philip of something he had quite forgotten: Holliday's terrible sickness. Not even the fat doctor could know what it had already done to him. One thing however was certain; he wanted to be relieved of the moral responsibility of deciding in what way it would affect his future with Phyllis. Go ahead, ask me, Phil said to himself, ask me, you syphilitic bastard, I'll tell you what you ought to do.

But Holliday did not ask. Instead he walked quietly to the door and stopped there for a moment with one foot on the coaming, looking more like a gaunt drunken spider than ever, his lank shadow falling jaggedly across the high metal filing cabinet and the ten-gallon jug of distilled water. He smiled insolently and said, "I'd better hit the sack right away. I like to get up fairly early so that I can skip rope before the sun gets too high."

He was gone before Philip could open his mouth to reply. His conduct was as unexpected as it was unfathomable. Did he really believe that Philip was unaware of his illness, or did he mean to trade on Philip's knowledge of it, as a blind singer on a subway benefits from the guilty superiority of his seated listeners, so that he could wrench the final coins of pity from his own listener? Whatever his belief, whatever his intention, he was tricky, mean, dishonorable, and despicable.

Philip jerked the typewriter towards him and typed out the entries in his log from the sweat-soaked jottings he had made while listening to the letters. When he had finished, bringing himself up to the minute in this impersonal diary that no one would ever read aloud, he leaned back weakly, exhausted by the force of his hatred and the realization of what it meant.

As he sat numbly watching the complex clock, with its slowly swinging silver second hand, and its hypnotic double circle of numbers that indicated both Greenwich Mean Time and Ship's Time (neither of which had any meaning for him now), Phil could smell the stale fumes of his visitor's gin. The room was too quiet. The subdued static that had sputtered softly throughout the reading of the letters was dying away to a whisper. One

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of his batteries had gone dead; he noted the fact in the log and signed his name as self-witness to his exit from this room. Then he dismounted the battery and connected a fresh one.

He stepped warily out on deck, staggering a little under the weight of the dead battery, which he now had to give a decent burial. Moving slowly along the boat deck past the captain's cabin, his eyes gradually strengthening in the pale glow of the masthead lights as the rest of his body weakened, the battery which he carried on his shoulder (like a young father stealthily bearing the coffin of his dead infant to a moonlit cemetery) growing heavier with each step, he came abreast of the chart room at last under the watchful stars and paused to catch his breath.

Then he noticed a figure standing on the bitts at the bow of the vessel. He was leaning over the side, apparently watching the phosphorescent fish fleeing in the white spume from the ship's cutting edge. He was not the bow lookout; he was not, in fact, a crew member at all. Who else but myself, thought Philip, would stand nervously peering ahead, towards America, at four o'clock in the morning, on this swaying, laggard vessel? The man straightened, flung something to leeward with the sweeping motion of a baseball pitcher, then bent over the gunwale once again. It was Bradley Holliday.

Rage rose like blood in Philip's throat. He hawked up a mouthful of Holliday's gin and lemon juice—it tasted sweet and thick, like blood—and spat it over the side. Holliday was probably so exultant over his betrayal of Phyllis that he could not go directly to sleep; now he looked forward, no doubt, to leaping up and down on the catwalk once again with a length of rope, exposing his rotting body to the sun and the sea and Philip's loathing gaze.

Philip lowered himself carefully and silently down from the boat deck on the iron-runged ladder. As he approached Holliday from the rear, stepping quietly in his sneakers, he saw the engineer pick up a bottle and stuff it with paper. Holliday was so intent upon his task, twisting sheets of paper and cramming them into the narrow neck of the bottle, that he would have been unaware of anyone's approach even if it had been less stealthy.

When Philip was only a few feet behind his quarry, he stopped and hefted the battery, high in the air. Held over his head in this way, like an offering, it seemed to have grown lighter; and yet,

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he reflected, how easily it could crush a man's skull! Standing this close, he could see the exact spot where it should land: a little bald area at the crown of Holliday's head, circled like a target by thin wet strands of hair. The blow would send Holliday and his letters to the bottom of the ocean. While Philip stood behind him and a little below him, gathering his moral strength to a focus, Holliday raised the gin bottle which he had stuffed with Phyllis's letters and flung it into the sea. At another time the gesture would have been outrageously melodramatic, but now, in the pearly grey morning just before dawn, alone at the wet clear bow of the tanker, it bore a stern logic of its own, terrible and final. Yet when Holliday proceeded to tear the girl's picture into long thin fluttering strips that took to the air almost of their own accord, like the colored rag-tails of a kite, Phil was moved to protest this abandoned act. He took a step forward.

Holliday whirled about and revealed his true face to Philip. Everything of the rake, the lady-killer, the poseur, was eaten away. His feet slid from the bitts to the deck. His eyes, spray-flecked and mad in the growing light, glared desolately at the dead battery that was suspended over his head, then moved across Philip's face until they encountered their mirror in Philip's eyes.

As they stood at the bow of the ship that swayed slowly towards their homeland, face to face in this final moment of recognition, they stared silently into each other's eyes, and the sun came slowly and silently crashing over the horizon of the southern sea.

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EDGAR BOWERS

To accompany an Italian guide-book

1.

Beside the Adriatic a strand lies
Cut off from tidal violence by shoals
And low dunes tufted with sparse grass, where gulls
Repeat the air and water in their cries.

A tourist once might find at dusk that place,
Seeking a chapel, rumored to have stood
Neglected by the years, and past driftwood
Approach the curve of ruined beach, to trace,

Upon his knees, a dead gull's form, blue-white
And shrunk in sand; or rescue from debris
A conch from whose bright curving rooms the sea
Mounts subtler through his ear than through his sight;

Or while the darkness washes what he sees,
Come down behind the tide to a pool, blue
As deep sea water and as still, to view
Red coral arms, azure anemones,

And living shells which, secret and intense,
Add curve on curve of marble surfaced lime
To their perfection, while the whole of time
Seems brought to bear on underwater silence.

2.

The equinoctial rains began toward dawn
And would have drenched his pillow, had he not
Been awakened by their sudden coming on
In time to pull his double windows shut.

The down-pour struck the water into foam
Below the casement, and the off-sea squall
Blew chill against his face. The heavy gloom
Concealed without a break the Grand Canal,

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Where earlier in the evening through the heat
Gondolas came from Lido, black prows high
And lamps reflecting orange streaks on wet,
To land where Stephen dominates the sky.

There, though the outside wash against the glass
Obscured the stone in which great works decay,
He contemplated in its shifting mass
The dense and shadowy basilica

Of Saint Mark floating on the Square, as when
The Slavic fleet crept toward it from the sea
With muffled oars, concealed by mist and rain
And early morning darkness, silently,

Past Arsenal and *dromi* anchored near,
Feeding their pirate cunning on the rich
Shadow of treasure glimmering in the air;
And waiting for the drag of hull on beach.

3.

A chalk white road bends dusty through plane trees
And gleams past tawny fields, mown yesterday,
Where now and then late gleaners quit the shade
To gather what remains there of the hay.

Up foothills by stripped orchards, sweet with fruit
That fell before the picking underfoot,
Ferment for bees, and vineyards where of late
Full clusters hung down purple to the root,

It gains a meadow overlooking valleys
And narrow rivers on whose flow the leaves
Go touched with fiery coolness to the sea.
The meadow's edge is piled around with sheaves,

And near them on smooth grass the harvesters
Assemble in a row to celebrate
The season, as lost generations did
Upon that spot at this same lunar date.

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Together with fine movements they inherit
They purify of accidental dross
Each gesture, simple as the body is
But more complex with living and its loss,

To verify their being by their doing.
While in the woods and thickets, savage chromes
Lose, destitute of birds, their summer shapes;
And bees grow numb about their sated combs.

Grove and Building

When, having watched for a long time the trees
Scatter the sun among their shaded places,
You turn away, your face is many faces,
Each formed by the resistance of the leaves.

And through the dim contagion in your eyes
The agony of light which shade refuses
With bright decay a near facade infuses,
Drenched by the ebbing warmth of Paradise.

Its granite vaults the reach of passive trees,
And, shadowless, its final line of being
Extends a line beyond your shaded seeing
To train your sight on nothing that it sees.

There, at that moment of arrest, you feel
Against the blood veiling the eyes' repose
The prudent sun, the blood red solar Rose,
Unshadowed being turning like a wheel

At once clock-wise and also counter-wise,
That from its light whose motion is unending,
All shadows turn and, on one axis bending,
Lose their umbrageous choice within your eyes.

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GERARD DE NERVAL

Delfica

Ultima Cumaei venit jam carminis aetas

La connais-tu, Dafné, cette ancienne romance,
Au pied du sycomore, ou sous les lauriers blancs,
Sous l'olivier, le myrte, ou les saules tremblants,
Cette chanson d'amour qui toujours recommence? . . .
Reconnais-tu le Temple au péristyle immense,
Et les citrons amers où s'imprimaient tes dents,
Et la grotte fatale aux hôtes imprudents,
Où du dragon vaincu dort l'antique semence? . . .
Ils reviendront, ces Dieux que tu pleures toujours . . .
Le temps va ramener l'ordre des anciens jours,
La terre a tressailli d'un souffle prophétique:
Cependant la sibylle au visage latin
Est endormie encor sous l'arc de Constantin . . .
Et rien n'a dérangé le sévère Portique.

El Desdichado

Je suis le ténébreux,—le veuf,—l'inconsolé,
Le prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie:
Ma seule étoile est morte,—et mon luth constellé
Porte le soleil noir de la Mélancolie.
Dans la nuit du tombeau, toi qui m'as consolé,
Rends-moi le Pausilippe et la mer d'Italie,
La fleur qui plaisait tant à mon coeur désolé,
Et la treille où le pampre à la rose s'allie.
Suis-je Amour ou Phébus? . . . Lusignan ou Biron?
Mon front est rouge encor du baiser de la reine,
J'ai rêvé dans la grotte où nage la sirène . . .
Et j'ai deux fois vainqueur traversé l'Achéron,
Modulant tour à tour sur la lyre d'Orphée
Les soupirs de la sainte et les cris de la fée.

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translated by
RICHMOND LATTIMORE

Delphica

Ultima Cumaei venit jam carminis aetas

Do you remember, Daphne, that archaic strain
by the sycamore base, by pale laurels, below
the olive tree, the myrtle or disturbed willow,
that song of love forever rising once again?
Do you remember the huge court, the god's domain,
those bitter lemons where the marks your teeth made show,
the cave whose rash indwellers found death long ago
where sleeps the seed primeval of the dragon slain?
They will come back, those gods whom you forever mourn,
for time shall see the order of old days reborn.
The earth has shuddered to a breath of prophecy.
And yet the sybil with her Latin face serene
lies sleeping still beneath the arch of Constantine
where nothing broke the cold gateway's austerity.

El Desdichado

I am the dark, the widowed, the disconsolate.
I am the prince of Aquitaine whose tower is down.
My only star is dead, and star-configurate
my lute wears Melancholy's mark, a blackened sun.
Here in the midnight of the grave, give back, o late
my consolation, Pausilippe and the Italian
sea, with that flower so sweet once to my desolate
heart, and the trellis where the vine and rose are one.
Am I Love? Am I Phoebus, Biron, Lusignan?
Crimson the queen's kiss blazes still upon my face.
The siren's naked cave has been my dreaming-place.
Twice have I forced the crossing of the Acheron
and played on Orpheus' lyre in alternate complaint
Mélusine's cries against the moaning of the Saint.

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ERICH AUERBACH

The Triumph of Evil in Pascal

IL EST JUSTE que ce qui est juste soit suivi, il est nécessaire que ce qui est le plus fort soit suivi. La justice sans la force est impuissante; la force sans la justice est tyrannique. La justice sans force est contredite, parce qu'il y a toujours des méchants; la force sans la justice est accusée. Il faut donc mettre ensemble la justice et la force; et pour cela faire que ce qui est juste soit fort, ou que ce qui est fort soit juste.

La justice est sujette à dispute, la force est très reconnaissable et sans dispute. Ainsi on n'a pu donner la force à la justice, parce que la force a contredit la justice et a dit que c'était elle qui était juste. Et ainsi, ne pouvant faire que ce qui est juste fût fort, on a fait que ce qui est fort fût juste.

It is right that what is right should be obeyed;
It is necessary that what is strongest should be obeyed.

Right without might is powerless;
Might without right is tyrannical.

Right without might is gainsaid, because there are always offenders;
Might without right is impeached.

We must then combine right and might, and for this end make
what is right, strong,
or what is strong right.

Right is subject to dispute;
Might is easily recognized and is not disputed.

So
we cannot give might to right, because might has gainsaid right, and has declared that it is she herself who is right.

And thus
being unable to make what is right strong,
we have made what is strong right.

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The text (*Pensées*, ed. Brunschvicg, 298) expresses with utmost vigor the weakness of right when confronted with might. The stylistic analysis is very easy; it can be made just by copying the fragment again in the way I have done with the translation, stressing the style devices. Then you see at once that the idea is developed by a continuous play of antithetic statements, put forward in pairs of sentences with symmetrical structure (isokola). There are six such pairs of isokola. The first three describe the problem. There are but a few explanatory words not fitting into the antithetic scheme. Then comes the result of the preceding statements: there is a task ahead. This task may be achieved in alternative ways: these are expressed in the fourth pair of isokola. Here begins a syllogism of the following form: one had to do either *A* or *B*; *A* was impossible; therefore one was obliged to do *B*. The second premise (*A* was impossible) is strongly emphasized: the reason why *A* was impossible is given in the fifth pair of isokola, but the structure, this time, is not completely symmetrical: the second part has been lengthened and reinforced. Then, the second premise itself appears twice in the final conclusion, which ends both the syllogism and the entire *pensée*. This final conclusion is put forward in a twofold graduation: *ainsi . . . et ainsi.* The first *ainsi* presents a dramatic development of the argument of the second premise (with stress on *elle*); and the second, *et ainsi*, repeating once more—*A* is impossible—contains, with an accent of bitter triumph, the final result in a final pair of isokola.

This short analysis reveals something of Pascal's style: the unique fusion of logic, rhetoric and passion. The whole argument seems to be a logical procedure, but the rhetorical play with two concepts in identical and antithetic structures introduces a dramatic tension, and when at the end, Might emerges from the play of concepts, raising its head and its voice, there is something like a concrete picture of its triumph.

As for the two concepts opposed to one another, right and might, they first appear as mutually independent powers; the meaning of each seems to be well established, well known to every reader; each seems to be entirely different from the other and autonomous; no definition of either is given. But in the continuous play of antithesis, there slowly emerges a new meaning, a new relation between them: finally it becomes evident that they are not independent of one another, but that one of them (right) is

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nothing but a function of the other. When Pascal says that it is right to follow right, that right is powerless without might, that might without right causes complaint, that there are always wicked people who oppose right—when we hear all that we are entitled to assume that he acknowledges the existence of an objective right, different from might and at least theoretically independent of it. But as soon as we read that right is always subject to discussion, but might unequivocal and immediately recognizable—when we are left without any authority entitled to decide what right is—when we are abandoned hopelessly to the right which is in the hand of might—then we realize that according to Pascal there is no right independent of might; that its place is not, as it seemed first, opposed to and independent of might, but at its side as its servant. (Incidentally, I may say that Pascal found the formula in Amyot's translation of Plutarch's *Solon*: One must combine right with might.)

Now, a modern reader may be inclined to think that there is some sophistry involved in Pascal's argument. He may object that Pascal uses the word *right* in two different senses; he first uses it to signify natural or absolute right; and this natural right, the idea of justice, may well be opposed to might, and it remains right even if might overpowers it. But later on, in order to achieve his pessimistic conclusions (such may be the objection of the reader), Pascal shifts the meaning of right from its ideal and natural meaning to its practical, established and positive forms. The reader may think that the order imposed by might is not right, but is only taken for it, that it never can destroy the conscience of true right. But such concepts, although they are very obvious and familiar to modern readers, are not Pascal's. There is no shift of meaning in his *pensée*. As we shall soon see, he is out to reject the idea of right, to prove that it is a mirage. In order to understand his *pensée*, we have to investigate how it originated in his mind; for, although its style seems beautifully consistent and simple, there are many influences and experiences contained and hidden in it.

From Montaigne, one of his favorite authors, he accepted the idea that existing laws are not based on reason and not even on the natural common assent of all men, but merely on custom and tradition. But custom depends on time and place, and changes

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continuously. What is lawful, allowed, even praised in one country or in one period of history, may elsewhere or at another time be considered a crime; custom sanctions even absurd, arbitrary and evidently criminal institutions. Nevertheless (says Montaigne), one must obey custom and obey the law based on it—not because the law is just, but because it exists and rules, because one cannot hope to find a better one, and because revolution is a certain evil —an evil not worth the price, since the new custom would not be better or more reasonable than the old one. Pascal took this from Montaigne, but in taking it, he changed the coloring, transferred the accent, and came up with an entirely different conception. The wavering of custom was nothing horrible to Montaigne; it was, to him, no reason for despair; his free, elastic and liberal mind moved with courage and even with a certain ease among the fluctuations and uncertainties of life; he did not need fixed and absolute order. I even doubt if he would have liked it. But Pascal needed it, he desired it passionately and violently. He required here-and-now fixity, permanence and absolute truth; he could not endure the impermanent and the impure; he felt it to be evil, and judged it as if it were evil itself. Beside the difference of temperament, the change of historical circumstances may have contributed to such a difference of outlook. Montaigne had lived in a period of religious and political struggle; he had witnessed free historical forces unfolding and opposing each other, and could hope that these changes and struggles, though he did not approve of them, might yet constantly balance each other, and that thus the result, if not good, might at least be tolerable. Pascal found himself in a period of fully developed absolutism, where one government ruled with almost unrestricted and apparently arbitrary power. However, for the explanation of the turn Pascal gave to Montaigne's ideas, the particularity of his temperament seems to me more important than the historical conditions: he had a more negative attitude towards custom than Montaigne; he inclined to think of it as an evil, and eventually substituted another concept in its place, the concept of might. Indeed, it is not impossible to interpret Montaigne in the same way, since he says that one has to obey law not because it is just but because it rules. But with Montaigne law can rule only because it is based on custom and tradition. Pascal wants to deprive custom and tradition of their

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independence, considering them as mere functions of might, as established by might. He treats a problem which Montaigne never dealt with: the relation between custom and might. He labels custom without might: *grimace;* and he chooses, with some bitter satisfaction, examples where the grimace must yield to might; he likes to lower custom to the level of mere illusion or opinion. He had no sense for the historical growth and structure of traditional custom—Montaigne had it, and found for it a very beautiful image (*elles grossissent et s'ennoblissent en roulant, comme nos fleuves*); Pascal sees no other origin of custom than an arbitrary act of power, the caprice of the legislators. Might may repeal such an arbitrary act at any time, destroying the custom formerly established and replacing it by some other. Montaigne does not discuss might in this connection, but it results from the context of his ideas that he could not conceive it except as executive of custom. It may well happen that two customs combat each other, and that one destroys its opponent; but naked might, not based on custom, has no place in the *Essais.* Pascal, on the contrary, confers upon mere might the capacity to form customs and laws arbitrarily; he even says, with bitter triumph, that this is rightful, because there is no other right than that which is in the hand of might. Where would we end up if we were to decide differences according to merit and justice? They would be undecidable. Who takes precedence, you or I? You have four footmen—I have one; that is easy, one has only to count.

Here we approach another layer of ideas important for Pascal's conception of right: the Jansenist ideas of Port-Royal concerning the absolute corruption of human nature. Indeed, Montaigne too says that we have lost our nature, and that only art and custom have been left to us—still he is willing to rely on a second, historical nature; the stream of historical life catches and surrounds him, and he compliantly abandons himself to it. But Pascal followed extreme Augustinism, as it was represented by the "gentlemen of Port-Royal"; according to them, the world is fundamentally and necessarily evil, in sharpest opposition to the kingdom of God; so that one has to choose whether to follow the one or the other.

Before Pascal, Port-Royal had no political theory; there were only instructions concerning the attitude of the Christian to-

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wards the world. According to them the Christian has both to liberate himself from the world and to submit to it—to liberate his soul, and to subject his body. Whoever can liberate his body too—i.e., retire from the world and live as a monk—may, of course, do so; but here as everywhere God's will has to be obeyed, not one's own, and God's will can be recognized with more certainty from external conditions than from the fluctuating movements of the soul: wherever an important and responsible position or other external circumstances oppose retirement from the world, you have to recognize in these conditions the will of God, and remain at your post; even within the world one may free oneself from it by diverting one's heart from it, by not taking part in its pleasures and desires—but only in its pains and sufferings, since the sufferings are the firmest link attaching us to Christ. As for the subjection, it means recognition of the institutions, political and social, in this world; one has to obey the worldly powers and to serve them according to one's position; for, although this world is abandoned to concupiscence and to evil, the Christian has no right to condemn it or to resist it by worldly means, since he is himself in the same state of sin and damnation; and since the evil of this world is the rightful punishment and penance which God has assigned to fallen mankind; the injustice of this world is, therefore, the true justice of God to which we have willingly to submit; wherever God permits true right to prevail in this world, He does not act by His justice, but by His mercy. Such an attitude, prohibiting any criticism of the institutions of this world, seems to preclude the formation of a political theory; the world, wicked as it may be, has been established by God; the Christian has to submit to it. Port-Royal did not dream of a political theory, and even Pascal would not have formed one, if external facts had not impressed the problem of politics with such urgency on his passionate mind that he could not escape dealing with it. These facts are well known: they are the events of the struggle between Port-Royal and the Jesuits. The faithful are obliged to yield to the powers of this world; they certainly are obliged to obey the authority of the Church; the Church is the communion of the faithful, established by God, she possesses supreme authority in dogmatic questions, she dispenses the sacraments necessary for those who want salvation. To be excluded from the Church, to

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separate from her intentionally, as did the Protestants, seemed to the Jansenists unimaginable and horrible. But if corruption gains power within the Church, if the powers of evil succeed in deceiving the leaders of the Church, the Pope and the bishops, so that they become instruments of evil, and if the Church, acting on her authority, obliges the few to whom God has granted the knowledge of the truth, to condemn publicly and solemnly what appears to them with utmost certitude as the very essence of faith: then there exists a situation without issue, a hopeless crisis. This was precisely the situation of Port-Royal during the years when Pascal was closely linked to it, and he witnessed, during his lifetime, most of the events which could not but appear to him as the triumph of evil within the Church itself. During these years the problem of might and right became urgent to him: this was the period during which he wrote the *Pensées* and the other fragments which contain what I call his political theory. Montaigne's doctrine of right as mere custom became linked, in Pascal's mind, with radical Augustinism, and he conceived the theory mentioned above, of custom considered as a mere product of might, as mere arbitrary power of evil.

Pascal was, by temperament, inclined to push his ideas to their extreme limit; in his last years, during the crisis of Port-Royal, he abandoned himself entirely to this trend; ecstatic visions and a miracle confirmed his conviction that he was fighting God's fight. Among the ideas which he thus produced, there are three, closely linked to one another, which I consider as his political theory: his hatred of human nature (and therefore of himself); his unveiling of the existing law as purely arbitrary and evil; and his acknowledgment of this evil law as unique, rightful, and legitimate in this world.

The hatred of human nature, in his mind, finds its origin in radical Augustinism. Augustine, in his famous distinction between *uti* and *frui*, teaches that one should not love the creatures for themselves, but for the creator—that a transitory, not a final, love is due to them—and especially that one should not love oneself for one's own sake, and thus prefer oneself to God (this was Adam's sin). That God is the only permanent object of our love, that all things worthy to be loved are united in Him, that created things are worthy of love only insofar as

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they reflect His essence—all this is generally Christian doctrine which may even be found in pre-Christian thought. With Port-Royal, and especially with Pascal, this doctrine took a particularly rigid and radical development. There are reports that Pascal, at the end of his life, adopted an attitude of coolness toward his nearest relatives and friends; nor did he tolerate the marks of their affection for him, because such affections would mean a larceny from God. He often expressed such ideas, and used to emphasize that love for creatures must necessarily lead to delusion and despair. For the object of such love is transient and perishable, not only in its essence as a whole, but also in the particular qualities for the sake of which we love it. It was intolerable to him to think of the transience and the mutability of the object of love; he was filled with horror at the feeling that the treasure of our heart is as it were diminishing at each moment and may be taken away from us at any time. Everything changeable, everything perishable, everything bound to return to nothing, seemed nothing to him: heaven and earth, his sisters and his friends, his own mind and his own body: God alone was permanent, unchangeable, eternal; God alone deserved love. The perishability and alterability of man was the special result of original sin, of Adam's exaggerated self-love, which, as an error both wicked and grotesque, has been transferred by inheritance to his posterity—this self-love is the very reason that we deserve hatred. Every man, by the curse of original sin, in spite of his evident imperfection and his mortality, considers himself as the center of the universe; loves nothing more than himself; judges everything from his own angle: obviously a horrible mistake, a horrible stupidity, deserving of hatred. And now, this word *hatred* gains an emphasis, a strength peculiar to Pascal. True, the word occurs in other Christian writings too, it even appears in the Gospels in certain radical passages from St. John and St. Luke. But I don't believe that it has ever before so completely dominated the idea of men's love of God. Pascal's famous passage concerning the hateful ego is not the only expression of this idea: he has said that one must love only God and hate only oneself; that the Christian religion teaches self-hatred; that self-hatred is the true and unique virtue. There are, here and there, some milder formulations; but the radical ones dominate the atmos-

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phere of the *Pensées*. Hatred of men and of himself were not qualities inherent in Pascal's character: he was capable of passionate and even jealous attachments, and he had difficulties in overcoming a high esteem for his own person, an *orgueil*—to which, from an earthly point of view, he was more entitled than most of us. His religious radicalism needed violent efforts in order to triumph over his natural disposition—in which, indeed, violent radicalism was stronger than anything. The motive of hatred of himself and of mankind can, of course, be partially justified by dogma and Christian tradition; but, if one isolates this motive from other Christian ideas and overemphasizes it as much as Pascal did, one is in danger of coming into conflict with Christian Ethics. The command that one shall love one's neighbor as oneself, implies natural self-love—otherwise, we would "hate our neighbor as we do ourselves." Moreover, there is in Pascal's extreme statements a kind of aversion to the creation in general: not only man, but created nature, because of its transience, is unworthy of our love: in this great physicist Nature inspired admiration, horror, a thirst for knowledge, but no love. There are few religious or mystic thinkers to whom the idea that the phenomena of this world are an adumbration of divine truth and beauty has been as foreign as to Pascal—thus, in his apology for Christianity, he never tried to demonstrate God directly from nature.

The second idea which we mentioned, the unveiling of earthly law as purely institutional and evil, is closely linked with the first, since it follows, independently of all experience, logically, from the corruption of human nature. Out of a corrupted source nothing can come but evil: our law and all our politics—this word to be understood in its broadest meaning, comprehending all actions of human intercourse—can be nothing but wicked—and experience confirms that they are. Neither reason nor justice dominate, but chance and violence. Pascal had an upper middle-class background; his family belonged to the *noblesse de robe*, the class of officials which practically controlled all the high posts in the French administration. But since the victory of absolutism in the first part of the century, this group had lost all political independence—they too had become, like the other classes of French society, objects, not subjects, of politics. It happened

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during Pascal's lifetime that, in the so-called Fronde, a kind of last revolt against absolutism in the 1650's, the last vestige of independence of the robe class of functionaries was destroyed. It would be wrong to assume that any kind of uneasiness resulting from these circumstances contributed to form Pascal's opinions. Nevertheless, in no other period of history would it have been imaginable that a man of his social rank and mental stature would have had such political opinions. His conviction that all political institutions are based on illusion, imagination, chance and violence is expressed with such paradoxical radicalism that there seem to emerge motives which are other than Christian. Of course there is no doubt that his aim was to establish extremist Christian ideas, but this extremism seems to be capable in effect of doing much more than that. In the *Trois Discours sur la Condition des Grands* he demonstrates to a great Lord that his authority and his power are not based on any natural and genuine right, but on the mere will of the legislators—given a different *tour d'imagination* in their minds, he would be poor and powerless. His position, indeed, is legitimate, as it is established by existing positive law; but only exterior deference and obedience are due to him (to refuse exterior obedience to existing institutions would be stupid and mean), without real inner esteem: for his power, even if he use it in an honest and benevolent way, according to the standards of this world, is nevertheless opposed to the kingdom of God. God, who administers the goods of love, is a King of Charity—but he, administering the goods of this world, is a king of concupiscence; even if he rule this kingdom but honestly without striving for a perfection of another kind, he would be liable to eternal damnation, indeed, as a gentleman (*vous vous perdrez en honnête homme*): but the sphere of grace and salvation is far beyond all earthly honesty and loyalty. These same ideas reappear in the *Pensées*, and the silliness and casualness of human institutions are stressed there in such a way that if they were presented without the Augustinian framework, they would sound extremely revolutionary. To give an example: according to all divine and human law, there is no greater crime than murder; but if my fellow creature, whom I should love, lives beyond the river, where another king rules, and if this king happens to be at war with my king, then I may, I must even, kill him! He lives beyond the

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river! This very fact is the only basis of my right to kill him. The whole period of absolutism, the period of the diplomatic wars, in which the common people had no other part than the duty to suffer them, is reflected in these words. And it is worth observing that such ideas, which were very widespread (although nobody formulated them as sharply as Pascal), were compatible with complete and even hyperbolically expressed loyalty towards the prince: never had there been a period more nominalistic than this. The base of Pascal's conception is, of course, an extreme development of the Christian idea of the corruption of this world. Through original sin and Christ's sacrifice the world has become the continuous murderer of Christ. Men having lost their original nature, any opinion or caprice may at any moment become their second nature, and precisely what at any moment becomes in actual practice their second nature, is decided by might. Real might is the only earthly phenomenon to which Pascal shows a kind of respect and consideration, although this consideration is so bitter and so filled with mental reservation that it sometimes sounds cynical. He respects the right of evil for its unmixed and pure clarity—and he explains his respect, sometimes, in detail. It is not vain (so he says somewhere), to be dressed well and richly; it shows that you have many servants at your disposal: the tailor, the embroiderer, the hairdresser, the valet, and so on; what you show is, therefore, not an imposture or a sham, but your real might; to be well dressed means to show one's power. And the people have a sound instinct in revering power and its exterior marks, although they are mistaken about the reasons for this reverence: they believe that reverence is due to might because it is just; that is a mistake. One must not respect power because it is just, but for its own sake, because it exists; however, it would be dangerous to explain this mistake to the people.

Here we have come very near to the third idea, the idea of the legitimacy of right based on might. But before I proceed further, I have to insert a digression, for my statement that Pascal acknowledges nothing earthly but power needs some qualification. In fact, he recognizes one realm more, situated between worldly power and divine charity: it is the realm of human thought, of earthly intellect, which he sometimes opposes to the realm of power. He carefully delimits the three realms one against the

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other: the realm of material power is at an infinite distance from the realm of the human mind, and this distance is a symbol of the infinitely more infinite distance separating the realm of the mind from the supernatural realm of divine love. The greatness corresponding to each of these realms is without value and influence in the others; earthly rulers, geniuses, and saints have each their domain, and each of them is out of range of the others. The acknowledgment of human thought, which is formulated in somewhat Cartesian terms, corresponds to Pascal's concept of man as a *roseau pensant,* a thinking reed; in the antithesis between the greatness and misery of man, thought is his greatness. Thus it happens that, when he opposes greatness of thought to material power (*grandeur d'établissement*), he sometimes calls the former natural greatness, *grandeur naturelle,* although he knows only a corrupted nature. This problem is not easy to solve; in the framework of his political ideas, the realm of human thought is embarrassing. If there is a realm of the human mind as opposed to the realm of might, and if, as Pascal says, any interference of power with the domain of mind is tyranny, that would make legitimate a revolution in the name of the mind—an idea directly opposed to Pascal's intention. For the sake of the consistency of his political ideas, he should have humiliated human science and the human mind in the same way as he did all other human things, he should have presented their activities and results as mere opinions and mirages which, like everything else on earth, are rightly subjected to might—but he was a great mathematician and physicist, a contemporary and an equal of men like Descartes, Roberval, Fermat—he could not go as far as that. Such humility was easier for Montaigne.

But, wherever he deals with political subjects, he does not mention the human mind; thus the inconsistency does not become apparent. In his political world might, i.e. evil, rules unrestrictedly—and it rules rightfully. In the elaboration of this paradox, which is the third of the ideas enumerated above, Pascal has gone much farther than Augustine or his own friends from Port-Royal; much more than these he has involved himself in practical and earthly problems.

Political and social conformism is a general trend in the French 17th century. The morale of the *honnête homme,* i.e. the morale

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of contemporary French society, required submission to the existing political and social institutions; to recognize one's exact place within the established order, and to bring one's attitude into complete harmony with the part one had to play in it: such was the ethical and esthetic ideal which was developing just in this period; Pascal's friend Méré contributed considerably to the formation of this ideal, and it is undeniable that this conformism, even in worldly society, had in the 17th century a pessimistic connotation; all the so-called moralists of this period, LaRochefoucauld and the rest, have rather pessimistic conceptions about human nature, in sharp contrast to 16th and even more to 18th century thinking, and their approach to such problems is never political. They never attack or challenge the political foundations or the social structure as a whole. It may be that, in the second part of the century, most of them were more or less tainted with Jansenism. On the other hand, there were traditional Christian conceptions encouraging this rather pessimistic conformism, providing it with a deeper significance. I may briefly describe such earlier, originally mediaeval conceptions, although, as far as I remember, Pascal never referred to them.

It is the duty of a Christian to tolerate this world, and especially to suffer its injustice, since Christ's sacrifice was precisely such voluntary suffering of the world's injustice, and since to follow Him is the proper task of the faithful. This applies especially to sufferings caused by political power, since Christ had submitted to the power of the State in principle as well as in His Passion. This power of the Roman State, executing the Passion, although it committed supreme injustice in that Christ was innocent, was nevertheless legitimate in so far as it had, according to the divine order of salvation, the task of executing the sacrifice which, as punishment of the first Adam's sin, was justice before God. In every Christian the sacrifice of Christ should be reenacted; whoever is favored to suffer injustice, especially at the hands of the political power, is allowed by that very fact to participate in the sacrifice of Christ, and should be happy to suffer.

Such conceptions and similar ones are based on the injustice of the world, but they do not encourage political criticism; on the contrary, they prevent it. One is taught simply to suffer whatever happens on earth, not to deal with the problem of whether

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it is sometimes or always wrong, or of how it may be in special cases. Most of the French Jansenists considered the world, in the Augustinian tradition, as evil; but whether the grace of God is sometimes granted to the minds of legislators and governments, so that some justice may prevail in many or in certain cases, or whether this never happens, such problems they did not deal with, nor with the means and standards of human reason.

But Pascal undertook this inquiry, basing himself on Montaigne, Méré, and his own experiences: he linked its negative and pessimistic results with extreme Augustinism, and, as it corresponded to his temperament, he thus pushed the Christian idea I have just tried to describe to the most dangerous and suggestive limit of tragic paradox. He states that according to reason and experience, the institutions and the whole process of this world are based on chance and violence; that our earthly order is nothing but folly; he believes in serving the faith by demonstrating intensely and convincingly the misery and the injustice, the arbitrariness and folly of the very principles of our political life, whatever they may be—and by adding that a Christian, fully and exactly aware of such follies, has to obey them, not because he respects them, but because he respects the will of God—who has subjected men to these follies in order both to punish and to save them: so that these follies are the just and unique law which we deserve. As far as I know, all that is dogmatically defensible; but, by the exaggerated stress given to certain motives and by the blending of these motives with radical political reasoning, faith is raised to such a paradoxical and untenable position that, at any moment, it may be reversed into its opposite. *Folie* means both foolishness and madness; thus I exaggerate but slightly by resuming Pascal's idea in the following statements: the political order of the world is violence and madness; the Christian has to obey this madness, he is not allowed to act in order to improve it; for it is God's will that violence and madness dominate; this is the genuine justice which we deserve; the triumph of madness and violence, the triumph of Evil on earth is God's will. One may not find many people willing to live as Christians under such a paradox; but Pascal also says, again irrefutably, but again by overstating the case, that the Christian religion is the only religion against nature and against common sense. In the eighteenth cen-

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tury, Voltaire and others chose Pascal's ideas as the starting point for anti-Christian polemics—it is obvious how easily it could be done.

One may be tempted to conclude from all this that a Christian following these ideas—those of Pascal as well as the more moderate ones of his friends from Port-Royal—is never allowed to fight for justice and truth. That is, however, not the case. Pascal himself fought; he was the author of the *Lettres Provinciales,* one of the most important polemic works of Christian literature and of literature in general. A Christian is allowed to fight, he is even obliged to fight, as soon as he knows that he is fighting not for his own cause, but for that of God. The Church too was in her first centuries militant; triumphant, she has had to fight against her enemies outside and within. But when, under what circumstances, may a Christian be sure that it is really truth for which he fights—how can he, in this earthly darkness, be sure that the Grace of God is with him, that God has chosen him as an instrument of His cause? *Incola sum in terra non abscondas a me mandata tua*—these are words from Pascal's favorite Psalm, the 119th.[1]

Concerning the signs by which a Christian may discern whether he represents God's cause, and concerning the state of mind required for his struggle, there exists, among Pascal's works, a document which, in my opinion, belongs to the great texts of Christian ethics. It is the fragment of a letter, first published by Faugère (now in the *Oeuvres complètes,* 2e série, Vol. 10, P. 154 ff.); neither the date nor the addressee are known, but it appears from the context that it was written in 1661, during the crisis of the signing of the formulaire, a year before Pascal's death, and addressed to a friend in Clermont.

The letter starts by criticizing the attitude of some of his companions in the struggle. They behave, he says, as if they fought for their own cause, not for that of God; they seem to forget that it is one and the same divine providence which has disclosed the truth to some and has hidden it from others; they seem to believe that they serve a God other than the one who permits the spreading of His truth to be obstructed. Therefore

[1]The 118th according to the Vulgate: "I am an inhabitant in the earth; hide not thy commandments from me."

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they are discontented, they murmur against the difficulties obstructing their way and against the successes of their adversaries. Such an attitude is a result of self-will and self-reliance (*esprit propre*). For if we violently desire something of our own will, then we easily lose our tempers, we become bitter about the opposing difficulties, because we consider them as something exterior, something not coming from us, not caused by ourselves, something foreign rising up against us. But if God really acts through us, then we never feel anything not originating from the same source as that which inspires our own actions; there is no foreign opposition to us, for the same God who inspires us permits others to oppose us; it is not our mind which fights against an external mind, but it is one and the same spirit, God, who produces the good and permits the evil. To realize this gives us peace of mind, and this peace is also the surest sign that it is really God who acts through us. For it is much more certain that God permits the evil, horrible as it may be, than that he has chosen just us to effect the good, important as it may seem to us; there is always a great danger that it is not God who leads us, but secret egoism and self-indulgence; and one must not forget that self-examination is delusive, one cannot rely upon its results; it very often misleads us. The examination of our external attitude is much more reliable than that of our inner motives. To bear external opposition with perfect patience means that in our soul there is harmony between what causes our will to fight and what permits the opposition to it; and as there can be no doubt that it is God who permits the opposition, one may humbly hope that it is He who causes our will to fight. But, says Pascal, there are some who act as if they had the task to lead truth to its triumph—whereas, in reality, we have only the task to fight for it. The desire for victory is all too human and natural; if this natural desire can be disguised under the will to lead truth to victory, one may easily take one for the other, and believe the fight is for God's glory while one fights for one's own. The attitude towards external opposition and towards the successes of the enemy is, here too, the surest test. For if we desire nothing but the will of God, we have to be equally satisfied if the truth is doomed and remains hidden, or if it is victorious and becomes known. In this second case it is God's mercy which triumphs, but in the first,

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His justice. And he concludes the whole consideration by quoting St. Augustine, who, commenting on St. John, Chapter 17, verse 25 *(Pater juste, mundus te non cognovit)*, has said that God's latency is an effect of His justice.

There are four motives which I want to stress in connection with this text. First a very significant one, setting off Pascal's ideas from most (not from all) other mystic trends: his distrust of one's own inner movements. Self-examination, according to him, is so unreliable, so permanently in danger of being falsified by self-complacency, that he urgently warns the faithful not to trust it. We have mentioned above that the inner voice is not considered to be decisive in answering the question whether someone may become a monk or not, if important external circumstances seem to oppose such a step. Here we find the same kind of thinking applied to a more general and more important problem. The spontaneous feeling of our soul to be right and to do good is not accepted as a valid and sufficient criterion. Only a perfect peace of mind, resulting from Christian peace and humility, proves that the good which we believe to be represented in our actions is really a good inspired by God.

Patience and humility, in such a situation, rest on the conviction that it is God, not something else, foreign and inimical, who permits the obstacles opposing the good cause. This is the second point: nothing foreign, capable of disturbing our peace of mind, opposes us; God's will alone decides the development of the fight; since our will, if really we fight for the good, must be in harmony with God's, there must prevail in our soul the peace, the patience, the harmony resulting from the knowledge that it is the same God who produces the good and permits the evil. In this connection I should like to warn my readers against a possible mistake: there is in this attitude nothing relativistic; nothing is involved such as "understanding the opposing point of view," there is no appeasement; the whole train of ideas does not refer to the opponents and their cause, but exclusively to God. His order of salvation permits that His cause be continuously opposed by impediments, the impediments of the world corrupted by the fall of man: so that God's cause on earth seems to be continuously in a critical, even a desperate, position. The very few fighting for it are, according to their nature, as corrupted as the enemies;

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only the grace of God raises them above corruption, and the grace itself is a treasure always precarious, never secure.

A third important motive is contained in the idea that our commission is to fight, not to win. For it involves the obligation to fight under all circumstances, no matter whether the chances of victory are good or bad. Such an obligation places heavy demands on the combatant, demands almost unfulfillable for average human nature. But whoever succeeds in adopting firmly this state of mind is at least spiritually invincible, and it may even be very difficult, in the long run, to subdue him materially. Experience shows that average human courage fails as soon as the fight seems to be hopeless: but those who know with certitude that they have to fight independently of the chances of success are invulnerable to despair and protected against disintegration.

Finally a fourth motive, the most important one: even if the truth is vanquished and remains hidden, even then, and particularly then, justice is maintained; for this is the very justice of God—that the truth remain hidden; if He allows it to become known, He acts not by justice, but by mercy, by grace and charity. This is a variant of the idea we had earlier to develop: that to suffer injustice is the justice due to mankind. Now, it follows that, before God, nobody on earth suffers injustice, or, to express it even more strikingly, that man can do wrong, but not suffer it; for, although the wrong you do to your neighbor is truly wrong, the suffering neighbor, corrupted by original sin, suffers rightfully.

Let us come back to our *pensée*. The investigation of the layers of experiences and influences out of which Pascal's idea developed allows us to resume some points of our initial analysis with more exactitude. As we have said before, the *pensée,* with its symmetrical antithesis, presents a fight between two concepts, right and might. They first appear as mutually independent powers, but in the process of the struggle one of them, right, vanishes; it is revealed as a mere function or as a servant of might. The victory of might becomes apparent with the fifth pair of antithetic statements: *La justice est sujette à dispute,* etc.; and from this moment we become aware that the whole concept of right is a mirage. "It is right that what is right should be obeyed." Yes, but is there a right independent of might, can we recognize

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it? We can not. Do those who are oppressed by unrighteous might complain rightfully? Certainly not, for how can you know whether they are right? *La justice est sujette à dispute.* . . . And how about might contradicting right and pretending that it *is* "right?" Is it wrong? Certainly not, for how can one recognize right otherwise than by the very fact that it rules? Thus, there is no right except the one which is in the hands of might. Is, therefore, might identical with right, and is it good? Yes, might is right, but it is not good, it is evil; our world is evil, but it is right that it be so. This last idea, indeed, is not expressed in our *pensée,* but we know it from other utterances of Pascal, and we have to know it, for it gives the key to the whole *pensée.*

The investigation we have made allows us also to appreciate more thoroughly and more exactly Pascal's mastery of expression. When an idea is accepted in its crude form, because it is widely known and commonplace, the expression is, in most cases, vague and weak, since the writer avoids the intense effort needed for exact expression; an approximate allusion seems to be sufficient to provoke in the mind of the reader a certain trend of thought, similar to that of the writer, and as vague and superficial as his. But when it has been conquered by the spontaneous activity of a powerful and passionate mind, then the idea, although it may not be entirely new, and although it may even be very similar to a commonplace, achieves a kind of rebirth: an expression so exactly corresponding to it, so perfectly framing its limits, that any misunderstanding, any shifting from its exact meaning seems to be impossible; and in which, nevertheless, several levels of understanding in depth can be discovered. It is sharp as a sword and deep as the sea; the old tricks of rhetoric which we have stressed, and which in countless instances have been used for the sake of ornament, here become the weapon of a passionate mind, fighting against common-sense for the tragic paradoxes of a dwindling faith.

A few words, in conclusion, concerning the relationship of Pascal's political ideas with those of other contemporary theorists. Two main trends had developed after and out of the ruin of the mediaeval political theories; they appear in the works of the different authors in manifold combinations and cross-currents. One of these trends is the theory of natural law. Pascal has

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nothing in common with this theory, he has not even anything in common with its older, Thomistic form, since he does not accept the idea of a law given by nature to mankind—except, perhaps, in the form developed by Hobbes where it means the right of the stronger. Pascal did all he could, at least in politics, to extinguish the *lumen naturale*. But he has some affinities with the other trend of contemporary political theory, the more empirical school of the art of politics or the reason of State *(raison d'Etat)*; although he probably did not study those writers (their ancestor is Machiavelli, and they played an important part in the formation of the theories of absolutism, of sovereignty, and so on), there are many similarities between his ideas and certain developments of the *raison d'Etat*. There is especially some similarity between Pascal's ideas and those of Thomas Hobbes. Like Pascal, Hobbes considers human nature as evil; in order to restrain it he too wishes a strong absolute government; the State should not be bound by moral laws, otherwise it would not be capable of fulfilling its task; and everybody is obliged to obey it, since it alone can guarantee peace and prevent anarchy. Furthermore, the laws of this state, according to Hobbes, are not based on any other right but might; therefore one owes to the laws unrestricted obedience, but no love or reverence; one owes to the state certain sacrifices, but no inner devotion. As it has often been observed, Hobbes' construction is a mere police state, and what it is supposed to protect is, in spite of its almost boundless power, the liberty or, better, the peace and tranquility of the individual. It is easy to see the affinities and the differences between Pascal and Hobbes. The affinities are obvious. However, since Pascal does not care for the earthly welfare of the individual but for his immortal soul, his ideas have quite a different coloring. Just like Hobbes, he stresses the necessity and legitimacy of a powerful government, but he insists much more on the fact that this legitimacy is the legitimacy of evil; for him the question is not one of mutual utility between the state and the individual, where the state owes the individual peace and security, and the individual owes the state obedience and material sacrifice—for Pascal, the problem is that of the submission of the Christian to the evil of this world, no matter whether the evil offers him some compensation or not. To be sure, he too considers

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it the task or rather the natural function of power to create and to preserve peace—he quotes in this connection St. Luke XI, 21 ("When the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace"); but even if the individual take no profit at all from the state, even if he is continuously oppressed and deprived of peace, his duty is nevertheless to submit and to obey. This goes far beyond the theories of Hobbes; Pascal here goes back to Augustine, and he overdoes even Augustine's ideas. St. Augustine had taught that government on earth, the power of man over man, is an evil necessity, caused by original sin; without the injustice originated by the fall of man, which had destroyed natural peace and equality, there would be no need of the punishing counter-injustice, human power on earth. The Christian has patiently to obey this power, ordained for his penance, in the hope of future liberation: *donec transeat iniquitas, et evacuetur omnis principatas et potestas humana, et sit Deus omnia in omnibus* (iniquity will pass away and all human rule and power vanish, and God will be all in all. De Civ. Dei, 19, 15, using Ps. 56, 2 and I Cor. 15, 24 and 28). From these considerations one may draw the conclusion that the Christian has to submit even to evil power; but Augustine has not expressly dealt with such a case. Where he condemns the power of the State (i.e., for him the Roman State) as evil, he does it because this state is a pagan one and because it worships false gods. One may easily infer from his scattered political reflections that a Christian State may well use its power for good—although power of men over men, in itself, as an institution, is an evil rendered necessary by original sin. But Pascal, who lived in the midst of a society of Christian states, combined both orders of evil: for him might is not only evil as an institution, as the consequence of original sin, but it follows from this fact that its effect must be evil in each case. To arrive at such an extremist conclusion he needed the pessimistic and nominalistic ideas of the theorists of the *raison d'Etat;* he combined them with Augustinism; thus he created a conception which, in spite of its Christian radicalism, contains germs of revolutionary criticism. The theorists of the *raison d'Etat,* more or less radically, more or less reluctantly, had expressed the doctrine that the State, in order to fulfil its task, is not obliged to follow the laws of morality: fraud and cunning,

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treason and perfidy, violence and cruelty, are legitimate in politics; the right of the State extends as far as its might, and is based on it. Pascal is willing to agree with all this. But those theorists were interested in the State for the State's sake; they considered it as a terminal value; they either enjoyed its dynamic vitality, as did Machiavelli, or they were at least very interested, as was Hobbes, in the benefits it might provide for the individual if it were organized in the right way. All that is utterly immaterial to Pascal. For him, a dynamic life of the State did not exist; or if it existed, he would consider it as profoundly wicked; he had no interest in the best possible form of the State, for all forms seemed to him equally bad. He combines the pessimistic empiricism of the political theorists with Augustinian ideas; thus, he got to the paradox of might as a pure evil, which one has to obey unconditionally, without any regard to a possible benefit—but without devotion, or better, out of devotion to God.

[*Author's Note:* The subject of this essay has been treated by two distinguished Catholic writers: by Romano Guardini in his book on Pascal, *Christliches Bewusstsein,* Leipzig 1935 (pp. 139 ff.), and by Jacques Maritain, in *Ransoming the Time,* New York 1941 (pp. 33 ff.)]

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BREWSTER GHISELIN

Pomp of Insects

I stood in the glassy sun of September
Noonday, in a great tract of ebb
While the blast of the desert fanned over golden
Open boulders to the fiery sunroad.

Over the littoral floated idle
Butterflies, brittle beetles, files
And swarms of flies at ease in sunshine.
They dropped to the rock and flaked the seaflush.

Thousands the spending air tumbled,
The sea seized and upshored like rubble,
But more the high, hot wind upheld,
Unsheltering amber overhead,

A willess heaven of inland insects;
Bright tons, trillion parenthesis
Of sighing unheard, poured over humming
Shallows to the deep chrysanthemum.

Winter World

Too wide, as with defeated sleep, her eyes
All summer turning toward Elysian green
Found, in the white of August noon, scentless
Abstraction, the old boneache of the snow,

And in tired leaves the hue of rock—for seldom
Rain changed that air, more seldom touched a root.
Cumulus hovered in a flowery blue
Above her silence, like a gyrfalcon.

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Sum of Summer

Where the green steamed in ribbons shoulder high,
I saw the topaz in the bittern's eye.

The Mind Remains

Three gulls flew over through a yellow light;
About our rock the sea's exploding gold
Fans fell, aflare between us and the sun.
We saw the long intolerably bright
Flame of the sun each melted mirror bore
Smouldering slowly through the sleepy kelp.
We watched the rumbling water bend and run
To sludge whispering far up the sandy shore,
Sluicing to pools of never resting white.
Rockward a sea lion sliding with her whelp
Rippled the weed-thick stream. I said, "She's bold
As if she hadn't seen the danger lying
On this dark rock like marble in the light.
Or she believes we're creatures tired of flying,
Me the brown one, you the brown and white."
A tern danced high over the landless waves
And fell, by hunger shot, into the sea
Fishing, and flew and fell and could not tire.
You leaned with fanning hair shadowing the bright
West. I remember all: cool thigh, chill knee,
And naked mouth . . . all the profound mind saves—
A nothing colored with the fall of fire.

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PAUL VALÉRY

Note-Book B 1910

These notes were written for the day only in 1910. It was certainly not expected that they would at length be given to the public.

They have been left in their order, which is a disorder. Respect has been shown—if it can be called respect—for their incorrections, blemishes, abridgements. The text is identical with the original, the photographic reproduction of which has been published by Edouard Champion. Sometimes one must lend oneself to the monstrous desires of the lovers of the spontaneous and of ideas in their rough state.

P. V.

LATE THIS EVENING, there shines more clearly this reflection of my nature: instinctive horror, disinterest in this particular human life. Dramas, comedies, novels, even singular ones, and, above all, those that are called "intense." Love, joy, anguish, all feelings frighten me or bore me; and fright does not preclude boredom. I tremble with disgust, and the greatest inquietude can blend in me with the certitude of its vanity, of its stupidity, with the knowledge of being the dupe and the prisoner of my residue, chained to what suffers, hopes implores, flogs itself, alongside my pure fragment.

Why do you devour me, if I have foreseen your tooth? My most intimate idea is not to be able to be who I am. I cannot recognize myself in a finite face. And my *Self* always flees from my person, which, however, it shapes or imprints in fleeing from it.

*

"Nature," that is, the Given, the Datum. And that is all. Everything that is initial. Every beginning; the eternal datum of every

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mental transaction, whatever may be datum and transaction, is nature—and nothing else is it.

*

To philosophize is possible because of the impossibility of noting intuitions.

If, when the thinker is speaking of Being, one saw exactly what he was thinking about at that moment, instead of philosophy, what would one find?

What is the *Cogito?* If not, at most, the translation of an untranslatable state?

*

It is perfectly useless to me to know what I cannot modify.

*

Power and money have the prestige of the infinite. Because it is not a particular faculty (of doing) (and of undoing) that one desires exactly to possess. No one covets a definite power: neither the exercise of authority as a profession neatly mapped out, nor gold as a value of quite definite objects.

But it is the vagueness of power that creates my desire, because I never know what I may happen to desire. I do not seek what is calculable. I wish to buy what is not on the market.

That is why everyone regards the possessor of this power, always, as a lucky gambler. Luck is presumed at the origin of every great fortune. No definite labour seems to lead to this infinite property.

Finally, it is the idea of the abuse of power that makes one dream so intimately of power.

*

How difficult it is to advance over oneself, to build the days so that each mounts upon the other; or to compound the interest of one's activity—without an external means, without noting in someone else the landmarks of that growth!

*

"Genius" is a habit that certain people contract.

*

I seek to please myself.

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I have the ambition of the whole.

*

Terribly jealous of what is worthy of me: never of the thing, but of the power to do it—and, above all, not to do it.

*

We kill ourselves, we destroy ourselves completely because we do not know precisely how to destroy what disturbs us, as a whole grove is burned down just to wipe out some nest of animals that we do not know how to get at.

If we could exterminate such an idea radically—or its power, the carnage of a whole man would be unnecessary.

*

If someone says that he believes in a particular thing (unverifiable) and if, in substituting for this thing something else of the same kind, the alleged motives of belief remain unaltered, then it can be concluded that the pretended believer does not believe, but believes he believes. Thus, to change 3 into 4 in the Trinity.

*

To look at oneself is to confront the being and its function.

The eye astonishes the seeing. The whole pictures itself part of the *means* of the mirror.

*

I find this idea of religion curious: that a fault committed takes away the benefit of the previous purity—as if the merit of "the soul" had undergone an "irreversible transformation." And that repentance and the forms of obligation efface, on the other hand, an entire detestable past, that is not less astonishing.

From what is drawn the potency of any one day over other days? He who is outside of time, why does he give this preeminence, for evil or good, to the most *recent* over the most *distant*? . . . Of these two mortals, one is saved, the other damned. But the life of the one is identical to the other's, taken in the opposite direction.

*

Literature is full of people who do not know for sure what to say, but who are strong in their need to write.

What happens? One writes what passes, what costs nothing and

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weighs nothing. But for these first terms one substitutes stronger words, one charges them, one refines them.

All one's vigor is employed in these substitutions: one mounts to singular "beauties."

The system of these substitutions should be drawn up.

*

In my "Ethics," if I amused myself in making one, we should be able to do all the *evil* that we wished, on the express condition of having wished it clearly and foreseen it as evil, without anything being spared from knowledge of it, having descended carefully into its likeness, into its probable consequences, into the *good* that we expect to get out of it—and considering as absosolutely forbidden any fissure for remorse, anything that would make me afterwards vomit up my past and sully the present day, the day after.

Do whatever you wish if you will be able to bear it indefinitely.

*

The world is of worth only by extremes and lasts only by means.

It is of worth only by the ultras and lasts only by the moderates.

*

Show in the same sentence its radiance, its response, its nothingness, its foundations.

*

There is an imbecile in me, and I must profit from his errors. Outwardly, I must mask them, excuse them . . . But within, I do not deny them, I try to use them. It is an eternal battle against the lacunae, the neglects, the dispersions, the gusts of wind. But who am I, if they are not I?

*

The cyclone can raze a city, but not even open a letter, untie this knotted thread.

*

What is learnt in reading the true writers is: liberties. Language is received anonymous and average, it is rendered unique and deliberate.

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In reading the bad ones restrictions are felt to be necessary.

*

There is no more efficacious, no more beautiful mode of war than to make oneself like the adversary, so much so that one can surpass him in his own nature, be more he than he, and nearer than he to his own model.

Then it will suffice to destroy this effigy; and to conquer in becoming once again himself.

*

Each author contains something that I might never have wished to write. And I, too.

*

Believe, or I shall kill you eternally.

*

He opens the door, looks at me. He thinks that he is not sensed, that only he has heard the noise he has made, and that I remain alone in my book.

But I do sense him there, I hold him and let him keep watch over me. It is I who observe him, and my motionless back does not quit him . . .

*

Hostile fruits.

The tree pants with fruits so heavy that it cannot hold them: it loses them, or it breaks. Is it going to groan that there are two *trees* in it?

*

To benefit from the lucky accident. The true writer abandons his idea to the benefit of another that comes to him while seeking the words for the one desired, by those very words. He finds that he has become more potent, even more profound through this unexpected game of words—whose value, however, he sees at once. What a reader will conclude from this is: his *merit*. And he passes for profound and creative—having been only a lightning-swift critic and huntsman.

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It is the same with war, with the Stock Exchange.

*

The "tone" of an author is the leading thing. We see at once by the tone whom he is addressing: whether he pictures an unthinking audience, a crowd, a superficial boy who must be dazzled, stunned, stirred—or a defiant individual hard to get into—or one of those light-profound people that let everything be said, that welcome, seize, shoot ahead, but quickly annul all that was written.

Some, one might say, never dream of the silent response of their reader. They write for creatures that gape.

. . . The man, the poet that gives in the most to the unconscious, that finds therein his vigour and his "truth," always counts more and more on the stupidity of his reader.

*

Man is: having to be spent; either by others, or by himself. And that is what is called his *worth*. And this worth taken away, man is nothing.

*

Teste loaded down with links.

I know so many things—I suspect so many connections—that I do not talk any more. I do not even think any more, foreseeing, as soon as the idea rises, that an immense system is being set in motion, that an enormous labour is demanded, that I shall not go on to where I know I *ought to* go. In its very embryo it tires me out. I shall not have the courage to enter into the detailed account of this flash that lights up years for an instant.

*

Man is man only at his surface.

Lift off the skin, dissect: here begin the machines. After that, you lose yourself in an inexplicable substance, alien to all you know, and yet it is the essential.

It is the same with your desire, with your feelings and your thought. The familiarity and the human appearance of these things vanish on examination. And if, lifting up language, one wishes to see beneath this skin, what appears bewilders me.

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*

A great percentage of the books that have been preserved owe their value to the disappearance of the other books and things that accompanied them in the beginning. Others lose their value through the same destruction, which has no connection with the works, and which acts upon an era as the ink stain upon a drawing.

*

What surrounds me, what I have bought, what I have written, what I have printed, my children, my books, my disorder or my order—all this resembles me more than I resemble myself. Has more stability and appearance than my moment.

*

Odors, more than anything, give me the sensation of the unusual. It is through them that I find myself in a foreign city. Nothing new in odorless streets: and, if my olfactory sensitivity happens to increase, I shall walk about Paris like a foreigner.

*

This book that seems so diverse to you overwhelms me with its monotony. To you it appears like the varied world. But, as for me, I decipher only a single "relation," terribly repetitious. It digests the whole dictionary, without a doubt; but it is still one and the same.

*

To think? . . . To think! It is to lose the thread.

*

All ethics rest, in the last analysis, upon the human propriety of acting several characters.

*

Youth is ended as soon as what I think is imprinted on what I do—while what I do becomes encrusted on what I think.

*

The desire ought to make its object, while vulgarly it is the object that makes itself desired.

*

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Learn to read your mind, and all the rest comes as extra.

*

Intellectual good and evil are baptized intelligence and stupidity; and the "intellectuals" have a consciousness of these qualities entirely analogous to the one that moralists have of good or of evil.

Herein also are represented the just and the reprobate, the pure and the impure. But it is no longer a matter of freedom. One fatality alone reigns. A sort of relative inexistence punishes the "wicked" of this kind. A sort of multiplication of existence seems to reward the "good."

*

"My reputation . . . My re-pu-ta-tion!" says this simpleton. "Isn't it the deplorable effort that I am obliged to make to imitate the false image you've made of me?"

*

For Christians.

The true Incarnation is this: the idea of God, the divine presence, through the activity of sense and the organ of the divine is exposed in the human brain, is put at the mercy of the innumerable accidents of which this brain is actually the place, the theatre, the appropriate *author*. And everything balances the god in this Variety Show.

*

Usefulness of mystery.

What is clear does not resist anguish.

Alone, obscure formulas permit hope, in the midst of troubles, when everything that is clear is frightening or ineffectual.

Despair comes from not knowing what to do, but a magic word permits us to act just in saying it, without knowing that it will be useful.

*

My sensation of immobility, my certainty of being motionless in this easy-chair is, without a doubt, precisely the sensation of being carried along by the earth in its movement. It is this feeling of being carried along that we call repose.

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*

The "truth," the discovery of the new, is almost always the price of some anti-*natural* attitude. The profound reflection is forced. The untimely remark is often fecund. We must do, or undergo, violence to see better or differently. The simplicity of notions—so important—is horribly costly.

*

A ship: it carries along with it all that can preserve the human life in a hostile milieu.

*

Here is an idea, today. It is distinct, quite readable, well in hand. I am pleased with it.

But suddenly I am poisoned! I perceive that I could have had it, this idea—ten years ago.

The same subject occupied me, I knew no less on this point; and yet it did not come.

*

There is always, in literature, this that is *squint-eyed:* the consideration of a public. Therefore, always a mental reservation, an ulterior motive in which all the charlatanism lies. Therefore, every literary product is an *impure* product.

Every critic is a bad chemist when he ceases to remember this precept, which is absolute. We must never, therefore, make a deduction from the work to the man—but from the man to a mask—and from the mask to the machine.

*

(According to Saint Thomas Aquinas, the *Aevum* is to Time what the spirit or the angel is to the corporeal creature.)

*

"Let's be fair!" Catholicism alone has deepened the "inner life," made of it a sport, a cult, an art, an aim—and has been able to succeed, through a systematic course, by some definite operations, by the controlled use of every means, by elimination, associations, progressions, periods—in organizing, subordinating,

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directing mental habits, in creating some fixed points in chaos. That is what struck me at the beginning of my reflection—when I was about 19, I think. This incessant labour by which the being is *tied together again*—in it lies the secret of the sole and true philosophy, which is that of creating a transcendent order—that comprehends all—and of fashioning a world, of absorbing in advance the accidental . . .

*

I should like to have my own modes of thought formulated and classified, to think within them . . . in such a way that each thought bears the visible markings of the whole system that produces it and is clearly a modification of a definite system.

In this connection, man is still in a savage state.

*

The essential, in everything, is always accomplished by beings who are very obscure, not distinct, and worthless each one. If they did not exist, or if they were not such as they are, nothing would be done.

If nothing were done, it is they who would lose the least.

Essential and without importance.

*

Grandiose Music is the handwriting of the complete man.

*

Ennui has no face.

*

There are many more chances of a rhyme furnishing an "idea" (literary) than of finding the rhyme from the idea. Thereupon rests all poetry and particularly that of the years '60 to '80.

*

What length should this work be?

There are always two independent factors.

*

Miserable things: paper, ink, timbre, cadence. These nothings more durable than the essential.

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In the essential, I find order and illumination, and these gifts are more often in opposition than is desirable. Of what importance is a very brief flash of lightning? And of what importance a constant half-light?

*

Man is perfectly obliged to regard himself as everything.

*

Everything rests on me and I hold on to a thread. This old antithetical idea takes, perhaps, its stupefying power, its poisonous "sublimity"—from its *real* incoherence.

*

You call me softly and from behind.

I think of you.

I do not doubt that this thought is spontaneous.

Your voice came so easily that I thought I was thinking of you on my own.

It did not wake the dog by the door. I was not aware of its sound, which was able to act without being, stirring silently its consequence: a face without cause, which is yours.

Towards no luminous origin do I turn from myself. There was no sign; and you are not at the other end of a glance.

I believed in a stroke of luck, a disorder, an inanimate inner event. I believed I was thinking of you by accident or by a mysterious and very delicate action—possible, if a certain void is made round my thought, if I withdraw from the entire present. As a result of the constant gambling of my resources, such and such facet will sometime have gleamed.

So, and in the same way, at times I think that I want something, and I spring to my feet, if the order comes without my wish.

*

Irony. Method that uses the sign contrary to the intention.

"Bitter smile." Why? To indicate a liberty.

Not to feel (or wish to feel) as one should feel.

New convention . . .

Irony good in conversation, which it complicates.

To write is repugnant to me. To write such and such thing

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implies that the author has not been able to think upon it *seriously*. It tends directly to glorify, therefore, the author. I express my feeling by its opposite, which it is impossible for anyone to attribute to me.

And then the reader thinks of the trouble that the ironist went to to be ironical, and this hardship hoodwinks him very much more than all his talent in making the object ridiculous.

To give oneself the trouble to pretend to scorn—to believe that one is giving oneself an air of superiority. Every ironist aims at a pretentious reader in whom he may mirror himself.

*

To strike someone is to place oneself at his point of view.

*

The desire for "realism" leads to seeking more and more potent means of *rendering* it.

The thing rendered leads to technique.

Technique leads to classification, to order.

Order leads to the systematic, to the complete exploration, to the most extensive use of all the means and to their general freedom, which is greater than anything realized.

And from reproducing some fact exactly, one arrives at a kind of gymnastic that comprehends the "false" and the "real."

*

Me! . . . that is to say, the You (*Toi*) the most constant, the most obedient, the first awake, the last in bed.

*

Such and such glance from another character is a play so exact in my questioning vision that I divine all his thoughts and ulterior motives of which I am capable; as if it were only a key opening myself onto myself in respect to him.

*

Prescription for destroying the philosophers.

One can read a book of philosophy in its sequence, as a possible development. But one can, instead of taking it like that, interrogate it or address it questions that one has made to oneself, and demand answers from it. This is the philosophers' danger, and

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no one resists it. This test is a test of *operation.* One demands a system to work completely and to adapt itself to a need, not to a reader.

*

At times, the landscape in the window is only a picture hung on the wall: at times, the room is only a shell amongst the trees, which prevents me from seeing the whole, not from being there. It is only an accident of perspective, like a leaf hiding a village.

*

To put a value on him who one is, such as he is, whatsoever he be.

*

There are certain phenomena that we have elucidated in a satisfactory way.

Now, the results of this explanation, which is so clear, have become habitual and indifferent.

It is certain that the same effect would be produced if we possessed good answers to all the other unsolved problems.

*

I fear the known more than the unknown.

*

Give things *sufficient* names.

*

"Artificial" means: "tending towards a finite goal." And is, consequently, opposed to *living.* Artificial or "human" or "anthropomorphic"—is entirely different from what is living or vital. Everything that succeeds in appearing in the form of a distinct and finite goal becomes artificial, and that is the tendency of the growing consciousness. That is also the task of man, when it is applied in *imitating* as closely as possible a spontaneous object or phenomenon. The thought conscious of itself fashions from itself an artificial system. But, as a consequence, an inverse transformation may occur.

In this way, early science gave itself definite objectives. To live always, to make gold, to *know everything:* plain foolishness.

Having now become *alive,* it is absolutely impossible for it to find itself a goal, or even a problem that, if solved, would

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allow science to reach its end. That is meaningless.

If "life" had a goal, it would no longer be life.

*

The inner man can fight only with himself; and, as a matter of fact, cudgels himself under a thousand different likenesses. If, in my mind, I hit the adversary over the head, it is I who am striking myself.

*

The "mind" is so bizarre, so capricious in its functioning, that it can never be determined if the lack of some condition or knowledge does not serve it more than hamper it.

*

There is a mania in seeing "appearances" everywhere. Whether one wishes it or not, whether one perceives it or not, this mania involves the notion of a "Reality" that has no other motive than to oppose "appearances."

But immediately one comes to think that this Reality is of no greater worth than the things that appear to be it. And of two things thought, *A* and *B*, there is no *lasting* reason why *A* should always be the appearance, or *B* always the reality.

The scorn for "Reality" follows just behind the scorn for appearance, as the body follows just behind its shadow.

Finally, there always dominates some "Truth"—but it is not always the same one.

*

. . . With an extreme precision, in perfect awareness of the cause, at the most distinct of distinct points, at the limit of habitable lucidity, to feel and to pronounce the: *I do not know—I am ignorant of*; and to know this moment as truly the most difficult, the most perfect, the goal *par excellence,* the center towards which the mind of the human being can only strain with all its might, and from which it is furiously repulsed . . .

*

Literary ideal, to end up by knowing how to put on the page only something of the "reader."

*

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A religion furnishes men with words, acts, gestures, "thoughts" for those circumstances in which they do not know what to say, what to do, what to imagine.

*

The average exterminated.

The most cowardly and the most courageous have the same chances of saving themselves—greater than those of beings moderately brave, moderately fearful.

*

Man tends to deny what he does not *know* how to affirm (to express).

*

Power without abuse loses its charm.

*

To be in the right, that is, to be at the point in departing from which one can only make a mistake. Any movement will cast one into the wrong; yet one will be obliged to move necessarily.

*

In a stage play, the characters that speak to each other pretend to speak to each other, but they respond to the speeches of the others less than they respond to the situation, that is, to the (probable) state of the spectator.

*

Useless words—are, on the contrary, of use in disburdening the man, and, in particular, they comfort him with a thousand possibilities that expire on being expressed; and once they have expired, the path of the distinct idea is smooth.

*

The civilized person in immense cities reverts to a savage—that is, isolated—state, because the social mechanism allows him to forget the necessity for common measures and allows him to lose the sense of bonds between individuals, which was formerly kept alive by need. Every improvement of the social mechanism renders useless acts, manners of feeling, aptitudes for the common life.

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*

Certain people give rein to the manias they are aware of—themselves underlining them; which brings satisfaction from both their mania and their self-esteem.

*

Anguish—revenge of useless and stationary thoughts, and the coming and going I have despised so much.

Anguish, my veritable *métier*.

And on the slightest gleam, I rebuild the height from which I shall afterwards fall.

. . . The day begins with a light dimmer than any night-time—I feel it even from my couch. It begins in my head with a calm allowing all thoughts to be seen through a pure state, thoughts still simple, drowsy, distinct: at first, resignation, lucidity, well-being, as in a pristine bath. The early morning is like a uniform sound.

Soon afterwards, all that I have not done and never will do rears itself and turns me back into my regrets upon my bed. This feeling is strong, tenacious as a dream, and it is as clear as the awakening. I feel terribly the stupidity and the truth of these movements. Useless, veracious are these fatiguing demonstrations. One must set oneself on one's feet and get out-of-doors, make one more hour disappear in the streets where the rubbish is being moved. Leave even one's torment unfinished.

*

Having foreseen so much that the response to the event is almost entirely *physical*, the psychic becomes henceforth, through foresight, a simple intermediary for nothing.

*

Evil alone seems true. The better becomes sign of the worse . . .

Pain, Anguish—full of reserves—and your inexact resumés and your frightful abridgements and your centuries and your flashes and all those invincible impossibilities and those overwhelming verities dealt furious blows by the simple duration of the past. Always brand-new is evil. Always young, pain; and terror, *always virginal*.

*

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It is possible to say to the World, to the Body: I don't want anything from you, and don't you want anything from me.

*

It is good, in order to familiarize oneself with a science, to attack, as one can, its most difficult problems, on condition that they be simple in their statement. Because, in presence of them, the distance between the beginner and the most skilled is the shortest. One is not any more discouraged by oneself than by the question at issue.

*

There always comes a moment for the "thinker" when, at the limit of his elaboration, elimination, fractionizings —at the end of his analysis—it is the first idea now received that carries him forward, as all the skill of the tight-rope dancer finishes up just at the extremity of the rope. There always comes a moment when every thinker is the victim of the conclusion of his finished effort, and of his own transformation (from thinker into sufferer).

*

A certainty can destroy a certainty; but an idea cannot destroy a different idea. It destroys its presence, not its possibility.

*

To replace, finally, clear-seeing, calculated injustice . . .

*

Naturae non imperatur nisi parendo.

Art will progress to constructions like those of the engineers. To innovate within nature, by means of its means. Which a well-adjusted "machine" can make me feel. The result will be a development of me, but viable. It is not derived from me directly through the circumstances of chance, but, rather, deduced from my properties in general; and if it is correctly deduced, it will defy all scepticism and live.

Rigor is attained only through the arbitrary.

*

Of certain walls.

A pain artificially soothed is felt as if behind a body that hides

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it in part, transmits it in part. It is as if diminished, imminent, obtuse.

Likewise an idea or a memory. One can feel them as lacunae—or as if not far away—as imperfect—as artificially not-present.

Not to be able to yield to one's joy, to one's effort, to one's tendency puts them, likewise, into a state of constraint.

An idea that does not let go of me does not pursue me entirely.

This strange division, and sleep. If one knew this division better, the dream would be known better . . . For it is a dissection that we do not know how to imitate.

*

Suddenly, through the remark of an imbecile, in a trivial mirror—we become the effect of what we are.

*

What grimaces, leaps, capers and cluckings must, in their own room, be performed by ministers, presidents, kings to avenge their system for the long strain they impose on it!

And he who listens to himself articulating some of these sentences, too grand for an individual, encumbered by enormous words, impossible to think—what inner stupidities does he pay out to himself under his cloak of noise? What ransoms?

*

No individual conceives directly that he is man—no one is man—but center, goal, base and end of all. No more than he can understand that he has to die does he understand that he is only a detail.

And, lastly, he never knows these things except through reason.

*

The mind is luck. I mean that the very sense of the word, *mind*, contains, amongst other things, all the meanings of the word, *luck*. Its laws are acted out, mimicked by this luck. But it is more profound, more stable, more intimate than any known, *conscious* law.

Any law I think out is unstable, restricted, constrained.

*

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There are lines of verse that we *find*. Others, we *make*.
We perfect those we have *found*.
We "naturalize" the others.

Double simulation in the opposite direction to attain this falsity: perfection . . . equally removed from both the pure spontaneous, which is no matter what, and the entirely voluntary production, which is painful, threadlike, deniable by any other will; incapable of submitting others to itself.

*

I do not like eloquence. But, when written, it is positively unbearable.

Why? I am not unaware of the reason. It is because it is the form adapted to a large number and to a mixture.

It is not the form for thought, etc.

There is no direct thought *capable* of such speech. It does not fashion long sentences that are so sure.

Its real prolixities are only gropings.

*

An important part of modern literature is given to communicating—not the final state of impressions, the state of something seized, unravelled, organized, cleared up—but the initial state, that of having still to understand (the encounter still to be met) the problematical state, confused, sentimental, sensorial.

Instead of writing formulas, it writes data in the form of implicit functions—somewhat as the modern definitions are made by independent postulates and no longer by one single sentence. Much the same as music.

*

"The mind"—turns over and over something that has not yet a name, even in its own language, a strange substance; until, at last, this "Subject," this nothing, this moment, this universal *support, this plasma resembles an object, concerns an object,* threshold, chance, stroke of luck, which is knowledge!

*

Great men die twice, once as men, and once as great.

*

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Of writings, some are made or find themselves made to act instantly and energetically.

A newspaper article is not comparable to a book. Others are for slow, lasting, growing action. Made for the third, fourth reading . . .

A newspaper article can be regarded as reconstructing in three minutes an accumulation of two hours.

A book can reconstruct in four hours a thousand hours of work. But a thousand hours of work are very different from a sum total of minutes. The cuts, the discontinuities and the resumptions play an important part.

And some writing is of worth as excitant or *apéritif* of thought, and some other as satisfier, replacement, nourishment of thought.

*

A writer is *profound* when his discourse, *once translated from language into non-equivocal thought,* compels me to a lasting, useful, sensible reflection.

But the condition underlined is essential. A skilful fabricator, as there are many—and even a man accustomed to assume profundity—can always simulate profundity by an arrangement and an incoherence of words that put us on the wrong scent. We think we are reflecting on the meaning, while we are actually limiting ourselves to seeking it. He makes us reconstruct much more than what he has given us. He makes us take a certain bewilderment that he communicates for the difficulty of following him.

The truest profundity is the limpid.

The kind that does not hold fast to such and such a word—like *death, God, life, love,* but who abstains from these trombones.

*

Between 2 individuals there are 3 differences: *a* may be the individual *A* seen by himself, *a' the same* seen by *B* himself, etc. Thus we have: (*a,b'*) (*a',b*) and for a third (*a",b"*).

*

Idol, everything that lasts, survives itself; forgets its conditions, imitates itself. Lovers of "beautiful things." Seers of the object,

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yet ignorant of its real beauty, which is its generation, its conquest, and not piety, not fillets and erudite preservation.

To become an idol is the aim of all distinguished men.

*

To invent ought closely to resemble the recognising of a tune in the monotonous fall of raindrops, in the throbbing of the train and the alternating strokes of a machine . . .

One must have, I believe, an object, or nucleus, or substance that is vague—and a disposition.

There is a part in man that does not feel it is alive except in creating: I invent, therefore I am.

The general advance of inventions belongs to this general type: a sequence of successive deformations, almost continuous, of the given matter, and a threshold—a sudden perception of the *future* of one of the states.

Future, that is, usable value, significant value, singularity.

*

If the astonishment that all things *are*, and are what they are, with their order and their disorder, their mechanism and their spontaneity, their rigour and their luck and their liberty—if this astonishment is only an impression and *forms part of these things;* and if it is not profoundly an indication—but fatigue, false need —if it does not signify that we have a foot outside of everything, and a situation half outside of my totality,

then, farewell metaphysics!

[*translated by William Geoffrey*]

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WILLIAM ARROWSMITH

Letter from England

"Drapes: 1000% pure English wool."
—advt.

WHEN MY WIFE AND I FIRST came to England, we lived for a time in the country and did our shopping for vegetables at the greengrocer's shop in a nearby village. Like most English groceries in winter, our store had a limited stock of fresh vegetables: a few roots and piles of muddy cabbages and Brussels sprouts. It was one day when the longing for fresh greens or celery or hothouse tomatoes was on us that I asked the shopgirl whether she never had anything more exotic in stock. She looked at me with a native's pity: "Lord, sir, we haven't had one of them 'xotics around for years. Folks couldn't eat 'em; stringy they was. . . ." And that was that. I got, I suppose, what I deserved, but it has often puzzled me just what vegetable, if any, she styled "exotics". More recently, I have been forced to the conclusion that she answered in the high old English manner: whatever else exotics were, they were not English stuff, and knowing that, she knew them to a T. Who but a foreigner would ask for them? Who but a foreigner would eat the nasty stringy things?

There are vegetable "exotics" and literary "exotics", and the latest literary exotic to arrive in England is William Faulkner. In point of fact, he has been here for some time: at least six of his novels, I am told, have appeared under English imprints, although only one is available at the moment. But so far as that figure of speech, "the intellectual," is concerned, Faulkner did not arrive until the Nobel prize singled him out. "Mr. William Faulkner", went the notices, "is, as everybody knows, the distinguished American author of . . ."—and then followed all the things that hardly anybody knew at all. It was a magnificent piece of perverse praeterition, magnificently to be followed up by the token republication of a novel and the critical "rediscovery" of Faulkner (and his relation to the recent English novel). In short, Faulkner will become one more name on the Englishman's list of "representative" American writers and, as such, the criterion by which critics will label other American writers as "unrepresentative", i.e. unlike Faulkner. At the moment, Faulkner's representative compeers of the novel in England are Hemingway and the realists and the Southern sexual-sensationalists. Cummings, Frost, Sandburg and now, Ransom, are American poetry, while Cleanth Brooks, Edmund Wilson and a good deal of scholarship stand for American criticism. Perhaps all this will make it somewhat clearer why Wallace Stevens is unpublished in England; why Bishop, Aiken, Blackmur, Winters, Shapiro—to name a very few—are as unknown as Tate, or Burke or Ransom in criticism; why it is so often supposed that Norman Mailer and Truman Capote are "great" American writers, and Kenneth Patchen a poet of promise; why John Lehmann can announce over the BBC that "nothing of any interest" has taken place in

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American poetry for over thirty years; and why a well-known English critic summarily dismissed all American criticism as "dustbin aesthetics."

Too shrill? Perhaps. Generalizations about English provincialism are so common—even among the English—that one is tempted to dismiss them altogether. This would be a mistake, and I can see no reason for hedging the fact that most English comment on American writing manages to combine a very great condescension with a marvellous ignorance. I am not speaking of the newspapers, nor even of the scholarly journals, but of what is called responsible literary opinion. Thus, if we are to believe the *Times Literary Supplement,* we will believe that America's chief literary critics *are* "Parrington, Lowes, Burke and Tate"—all of whom, it appears, contribute to *The Kenyon Review* and are thus sheltered by the "cossetting practices of the academy" (or, as the case may be,—of the tomb). A review of Robert Lowell has it that Lowell is one of the Southern Fugitives, "a group which includes such distinguished Americans as Allen Tate, John Crowe (*sic*) and L. Mumford". The recent *Focus* on American poetry was dismissed as "unrepresentative" (which it was) because it included "no Sandburg, no Aiken, not one poem from that brilliant group of American humorist poets, and no Negro poetry". Another critic plumped revealingly for the publication in England of some of "Wallace Stephen's fine verse-plays", and elsewhere it was announced that the poetry of Allen Tate showed the strong "influence of Edwin Muir" (who is, alas, unpublished in America). I have been asked seriously by English friends whether it was true, as Spender said, that all American editors automatically rewrote contributions which they did not like. And so they go. Most of the howlers are based on mere misinformation or even a disinclination to be informed. There is also prejudice. Thus that portly Puck, C. M. Bowra, self-appointed gadfly to America, and the Professor of Poetry, joins the Pound chorus with a new twist:

> Pound, after all the fuss and trouble, is nothing but a bore and an American bore. Read his poems in his own language and the voice is all too familiar. The unceasing rattle, the chaotic flow, the pointless gossip, the feeble generalizations, the "knowing air", the inside information, the culture—these things are known to us and give no pleasure.

It is, after all, only fair to give Pound's reply to this new "Mumpodorus":

> *Ah, yes, my songs, let us resurrect*
> *The very excellent term* Rusticus
> *Let us apply it in all its opprobrium*
> *To those to whom it applies.*

Are English writers any better off in the hands of American publishers and critics? On the whole, I think, yes, though it is characteristic of Americans that so many of them should think not. Thus an apologetic reviewer in an American journal complains that it is taking far too long for English poetry to travel the Atlantic: Edwin Muir, Bottrall, Durrell, Gascoyne are unpublished

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in America and Empson's poetry had a ten-year crossing. He goes on to remark that, in general, English writers are likely to find Americans "armed with all the prejudices of a cultural nationalism still self-consciously rebellious." Perhaps so, but I suspect that English writers will be even more likely to find Americans still self-consciously self-conscious (like that reviewer), wearing their cultural thin skins inside out, and inclined, in self-deprecation, to rate "exotics" out of all proportion to their worth. It may well be that by now the ugly political climate has swamped the old virtues of the American myth of cultural inadequacy, but I doubt it just yet; until then, it seems to me a rather happy notion that when American writing is for the most part so alive to literary activity elsewhere Americans should suppose their writers are insulated and ingrown. In fact, very few injustices have been done to English writers of ability (Empson was one, Muir and Durrell, perhaps Gascoyne, are others which should be remedied), and far too much uncritical attention is showered on lesser English writers like Alex Comfort and Stephen Spender. In neither England nor America has the fine critical acumen of Robert Graves been sufficiently recognized; but English criticism of a genuine sort is, I believe, better known in America than it is in England. And if America was late to recognize Empson's virtues as a poet, it is possible to say that in a sense they have never been recognized at all in England. This is not an exhaustive tabling, nor do I think we need one to see the final balance. Nor, I should add, am I trying to compose either a polemic or an apology, or to raise trouble, supposing it were possible on such a matter. I am simply concerned to say that these matters are so, and that they will not be changed by politely supposing they are otherwise.

This should not be taken to mean that there are no legitimate reasons for the neglect in England of American writing and no attempts to remedy the ignorance. Financial rulings make it extremely difficult to import any foreign books, and English publishers are very hard put to it to find the paper for printing even a sample of poetry by younger English writers, let alone Americans.[1] Sales of poetry are also as unrewarding and as discouraging as they are in America, and the sharp rise in book prices has made the publication of poetry even more risky. Attempts, however, to print American writing or to present it are not numerous, and they are often vitiated by ignorance. In publication of the novel, the most notable example is that of John Lehmann, who has brought out a number of younger American novelists, and as editor

[1]This statement I now believe to be false, though it is by all odds the commonest complaint among younger English writers. Yet it was the case in 1950 that somewhat more than 500 books were published here under the heading "Poetry & Drama," and that a sizeable proportion of this figure was contemporary verse and drama. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that there is altogether too much verse being published in England, and that altogether too much of it is bad verse. This suggests that the real trouble is one of critical standards and a failure to apply the selective razor. It would, however, be foolish to blame the publishers for being uncritical when most critics are. In this connection, it seems to me no accident that Faber & Faber possess an almost complete monopoly of the best poetry published in England over the last twenty years.

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of *Penguin New Writing*—now defunct—has published much American fiction; yet it has to be said that Lehmann's version of the American novel is an extremely partial one and that he has helped to fertilize the notion that American fiction is exclusively sexual realism. *Scrutiny*, it is true, did attempt to introduce and criticize some American critics, but it has evidently tired of the job. *Nine*, under Peter Russell, has published some American poetry and promises more, and its lively prosecution of its editorial work may bring about some interest. *Essays in Criticism*, the new critical journal from Oxford, will, one hopes, do something for American criticism as well as English. But other than these isolated examples, there is little else worthy of mention. The BBC has showed signs of stirring, but a talk by a Wadham don on American criticism managed to last twenty minutes, mentioning only two American critics, and, in the end, generalized to the effect that all American criticism was atrociously written and was on the wrong track anyway. What the speaker thought the right track was hardly needed much guessing, for he spoke as a devotedly English impressionist. And elsewhere—even in *Scrutiny*—it seems to be a pious analogy that if America, in a cracked figure, represents Rome, England must therefore be Athens; on this view, the line connecting London with the American outlands will be nothing less than a cultural one-way. And so, almost, it is, with few exceptions.

I take it for granted that this is not a happy state of affairs and further, that the question is not at all one of deciding between the cultural merits of the two countries. What is involved is a recognition, without reservations, of the simple fact that either country is the poorer in ignorance of the literary activity of the other. Classical parallels with Rome and Athens are not only dull; they are misleading, depending for what strength they have on a false correlation between political power and cultural depth. For this, Americans are largely responsible: thus *Time* stresses the manifest destiny of the American Rome, and the sophisticates emphasize the equally manifest vulgarity. It was both natural and predictable that English intellectuals, in their tarnished time, should grasp at the notion that they would play cultural adviser and Athens to the gauche Rome over the waters. In so far as they are able to do so, no one, I hope, in America will question that role, or dispute its validity, though its cool condescension may raise qualms. Americans, one hopes, will continue to be cultural expropriators, and rightly so. What can be questioned is, not the assumption that England has much to give, but that she has nothing to take in return. Speculations on this matter may be humdrum, and it is of course impossible to estimate what the effect might be in England of a wider acquaintance with American poetry and criticism, but it might at least serve to widen the very narrow conception of "representative" American work, and thus to dispel the gross distortions of American writing and America served up periodically by *Horizon*, Stephen Spender, Geoffrey Gorer and C. M. Bowra. In a technical sense as well, English writers have, I think, much to learn from

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Americans, and it can hardly be doubted, questions of style aside, that English criticism would be the gainer by a close study of the better American critics. Is it really absurd to suggest that the technique of Wallace Stevens might be a useful alternative to too much Thomas? or the criticism of Blackmur a rein upon the isolated overconfidence of the *Scrutiny* circle? Has Faulkner nothing to teach English novelists? Stated this way the questions are almost rhetorical; no one, I think, least of all an intelligent Englishman, would deny that the English have something to learn. Why then have they been so slow to learn?

The answer to that question takes us, I think, far beyond the mere question of literary relations but need not take us into the swamp of national psychology. No one will find the economic excuses mentioned earlier particularly convincing, and I doubt the English do. No one, again, if he is quite honest, will deny that there is something defensive in the English attitude toward America, and that this defensiveness is founded for the most part on the altered circumstances of English power and the dominant position of America. You have only to read a Commons debate or the daily editorials to realize the extreme sensitiveness on matters of national prestige; and this sensitiveness can be easily verified independently of political and economic affairs. In literary discussion it is present as a point of national honor because English prestige in the world is felt to rest so heavily now upon her ability to keep her cultural leadership (evidenced in recent proposals that England should expand "her great cultural exports, her most abundant resource, to the world.") In this way, it may be understandable how, in English eyes, America has had to pay the price of her political dominance by being thrown even further into the cultural shadow of England. And this seems to me to be confirmed in the readiness with which intelligent Englishmen accept the common representation of America as a barbarous commercial circus, lost to values and incapable of arts and letters. The more Roman America seems, so much the more Athenian looks England.

Yet it would be a mistake to stress too strongly the element of self-protection in the English version of America, beyond saying that there is an unfortunate tendency here to hearken to the more corrupt accounts. In one sense at least, however, such a version was almost inevitable, and if the English think of America as a potent barbarity and American writing as commercialized trash, they surely have sound inductive reasons for doing so. For it is no exaggeration to say that almost the only America which is available to the intelligent Englishman is precisely that commercial nightmare dished up to him by atrocious American films and the high-powered jargon of *Time*, *Life*, *The Reader's Digest* and *The New Yorker*, not to mention the occasional fillip of Congressional junkets and imported potboilers. Indeed, it has been the unfortunate effect of import controls that they have tended to favor just those American ventures which are sufficiently powerful or popular (like the film companies) to force concessions; but learned journals non-commercial books, experimental work and literary reviews (it is, for instance, impossible to import *The Hudson*

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Review into England except under single cover) have all suffered.[2] Consequently, there has been a drastic diminution in the amount of non-commercial information available; yet even if controls were freed to a degree, the mass media have had their way for so long that it is doubtful whether much headway could be made for some time. Even in America, as Americans well know, cultural evidence opposed to the Hollywood version of America is hard to come by. The pattern is in its outline only too familiar, and in respect of Commercial America, Britain is no better off than the rest of Europe. It is for this reason that the problem seems to me so important and so pressing: it involves, at a crucial time, not only literary relations between American and European intellectuals, in a technical sense, but also cultural relations as a whole among the Western nations. It comes to this: unless you can convince Europeans that there is another and more civilized America than that of *Life* and Hollywood, it stands to reason that intelligent Europeans will be driven, through ignorance or inclination, to accept the commercial version as official. And it should be added as a political parenthesis that from that commercial version the Stalinist picture of America differs only in a gross heightening of the most reprehensible features.

I should not like to have these remarks construed as a proposal for cultural propaganda in the narrow sense, but for a propaganda of cultural facts, if you like. For I take it to be a fact that there are other and non-commercial Americas, however small, however alienated, which can and do contradict the prevalent commercial version. There can, for instance, be little doubt that the England which figures in *Picture Post* and *Punch* is depressingly characteristic; yet no one, except in the extremes of prejudice, would accept it as the whole story. We do not accept it precisely because we have so much contrary evidence in the form of English writing, music and scholarship. And it is the absence of reliable evidence of another America which makes it so difficult to combat the commonly received account. Yet if evidence is what is needed—evidence in the form of good representative American work—there are two chief obstacles to making this evidence available: the difficulty of coping with the immense advantages of the commercial media and the sheer dead-weight of national provincialisms. Neither difficulty can be met head-on or on short order, and it may be futile to hope for tangible results short of a generation or more.

I take it that proposals for international "cultural boards" are both hopeless and useless, especially if they are chosen as official or semi-official agencies. The

[2]Given the extracts one might compile from *The Congressional Record*, it is perhaps unwise to attach much significance to an isolated extract from a Parliamentary session, however much it helps to point the case. Yet, it was recently proposed in Parliament that, in order to keep up cultural rapport with France, restrictions on the import of French books should be lifted; the proposal was evaded, amid general laughter, by a sniggering remark about the propriety of importing French obscenities. The proposal was dropped.

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probability is high, one is sure, that any cultural board chosen by any customary means in the United States would simply duplicate the commercial organizations, and we should find ourselves committed to a hard official view of an impoverished American culture. Even a sane body, like the British Arts Council, is not to be entrusted with selective powers, though it ought to make recommendations. We are left with what we have always had: commercial enterprises, good and bad, more private ventures, like the literary reviews, and the learned publications. We are also left with a great chance for accidents, misinformation and misunderstandings, made even greater by the increased hold on foreign markets of the calculated deceptions of the entertainment industry. In the absence of other suggestions, I should like to push what seems to me one small loophole in the commercial arrangements, through which a small window on America might eventually be widened out.

It is generally taken for granted by intellectuals that nothing except a head-on struggle with the entertainment industry is possible; and that everything which is not a head-on struggle must therefore be a debasing compromise. But to think so is to discard a convenient artistic advantage even before its possibilities have been investigated. For there does seem to me another way than the customary abuse or despair for the interested artist to get at the entertainment industry; in the same way the artist can, if he is "alienated," recover a civil status without the prostitution of his art. The essence of his work will be a piece of artistry which is also a hoodwinking, an outwitting, and a turning of the tables on the commercial colossus. There is no inherent reason why the entertainment industry, any more than a bad government or a corrupt university, should be incapable of being reformed from within. It is a mistake, for instance, to think of the publishers of best-sellers as being explicitly committed to bad art; on the contrary they are committed merely to saleable commodities, and these commodities have by now established certain minimal formal conventions. It is these conventions, not popular standards (whatever they may be), which the artist exploits and uses for his own undeflected ends; he takes a popular convention—like "the Western" or the "detective-story" or the comedy of "marital misunderstanding" or the "historical romance"—and plays hell with it. I hope it will be clear that this technique is not a compromise, but a stratagem, and a stratagem which has been more or less successfully employed in at least two important instances that I know of. I mean Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* and the last two novels of Robert Penn Warren.

All this may seem a far cry from Europe and England, but both at home and abroad the problem of the arts is as much commercial as it is critical: it needs practical craft allied to artistic craft, for by practical craft I mean no more and no less than the ability to make your artistry and technical skills manœuverable, to put the arts into a position of purchase on our culture as it is and as we would not have it be. Eliot and Warren, whatever their artistic success may

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be, are in a coign of vantage for what they want their artistry to do; their manœuvering has been misunderstood because artistic independence has been confounded with intransigence; because we no longer ask for practical craft from our artists, but expect them, of all men, to be the most immovable. And so it comes about that many of them are just that: as incapable of motion as Bunker Hill and less volcanic. If, however, American artists can manage by exercise of practical and artistic craft, to master, by outwitting, the commercial Sphinx, there is half a hope that a more civilized America can be created, and created, make itself known abroad.

For some time to come, I imagine, most American writing will arrive, in England at least, via the commercial channels (as did *All the King's Men*), and if the arrivals are of quality, they may gradually make their way—and another America's with them—upon the English attention. In the meantime, for this is a long-range stratagem, there is much else that needs to be done. We badly need, for instance, a transatlantic journal in the English language, with editors of both nationalities, equally at home in English and American literature, past and present. Or, failing that, we need stronger editorial connections between the few existing English journals and their American counterparts.

For England, it cannot, I think, be stated too strongly that the need is for criticism and for journals that can pretend with some show of right to be authoritative. At the moment the English possess a handful of small journals, most of them working at cross-purposes, no one of them commanding the respect of more than a fraction of writers and scholars and critics. It is for this reason that *The Criterion* looks today like the Golden Age. Not only was it an international review but it was, in a good sense, authoritative. Until England gets a review, both critical and creative, in which it is a distinction for a writer to have been published, whose editorship is above the prevailing parlour anarchy, which will not be afraid to apply the critical razor,—until then, we shall have the customary confusion. Or so I see it. And, needless to say, it is only by way of criticism and editorial recommendation that a more representative American literature can be introduced into England, short of the long commercial road.

The rest is cautionary. To be properly "representative" a work needs to be, like a translation, both an approximation to the original and a recreation in its own right. No national literature will ever be perfectly represented in another country, and this is as it should be. But no representation has a right to be a complete distortion, and what else can we call the English notion of what is "representative" of America? There is clearly a double responsibility here. For the rest, the English must either take down their woolen curtains or go smother in them.

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ROBERT BROWN

Film Myth and the Limits of Film

FOR SOME YEARS PAST our notions of the impossible and undesirable in film have described an orbit around what Parker Tyler expertly calls the Hollywood Hallucination. By sheer economic mass the Hollywood factories have imported local craftsmanship from wherever it developed, squeezed out the technical tricks and personalities immediately salable in its market and discarded the remainder. During the twenties avant-garde cinema was an important source of supply for these materials but it failed to match the growing demands of the industry. The result has been on the one hand the conversion of the experimental film into a waste product before it was well begun, and on the other, an extremely rapid depletion of the Hollywood industry's natural resources. For the spectator and critic this persistent death-hold has meant that the commercial film has been drawn mostly from other sources of supply than the avant-garde; that Hollywood's cannibalism toward experimental film has made distinctions among its sources vague and difficult, and most seriously, blurred the differences between Hollywood film myth and its victim: the motion picture as esthetic medium. I propose then to examine some of the relevant qualities of this myth as they are borne in the commercial film, and these same qualities as they bear on the film medium itself, in order to indicate the crucial differences between the myth and the medium.

The ordinary dictionary usage of the term "myth" is the one that concerns us here: a myth is a tale of the supernatural world; it represents the universe modelled after the wishes and desires and fears of the myth's anonymous creators. It differs in function, if not in form, from the folk-tale and legend by explaining, justifying, and directing social behaviour, by presenting some version of a moral order embodied in superhuman characters and actions. It differs from parable in the scale of its characters and in not explicitly making an ethical point. Obviously a Hollywood film is not composed of solid myth. Considerable elements of parable, legend and folk-tale are present, and "myth" refers conveniently to the general function of these films without excluding still other ingredients.

For my purpose (analysis and explanation) the relevant properties of the Hollywood myth are three: the tendency to amalgamate human personality to film character, the tendency to interchange rôle with set, and the merger of these tendencies to form the utopian world of the animated cartoon. In the cartoon both properties are fully developed. All distinctions, for instance, between set and actor are abolished; they are interchangeable. Natural objects or household utensils can do their stint and then settle back into inanimation. The physical properties of medium-sized bodies can be re-shuffled at will; defiance of gravitation is *de rigueur*, a basic principle of cartoon construction.

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If in the animated cartoon characters and sets tend to be interchangeable to a degree not possible in the fiction film, yet Star-faces too have a certain generic appearance which is the stigmata of popular approval; when necessary they can be interchanged among themselves. The cartoon, then, has simply extended the process to include the non-human environment: all its parts are equally talented. Arp's comment that "even the stones breathe" is appropriate here, for the natural world is completely active in the cartoon, that most indigenous product of the cinema, and it is this unremitting activity that provides the nucleus for my argument. Its most important text is drawn from Parker Tyler: "the show-off camera," he said, "gives the audience an illusion of their own technical virtuosity"; and other kinds as well, it should be added.

This statement can be expanded. The "illusion of technical virtuosity" is relayed to the audience by the uses of the film camera. These uses all stem from the camera's ability to *move;* the early photographed plays were not films because the camera remained stationary. Just as a photograph cannot duplicate the effort of the eye, the stationary camera cannot discriminate, emphasize, arrange. It cannot even establish the rapport which exists between a play and its audience. To do any of these the film camera must be put into action, and then it immediately displays an unlimited capacity for motion through space and time, an ability to dissolve all barriers that is most obviously seen in the cartoons. In brief, the film camera is Omnipotent. Its history has been largely one of utilizing these possibilities: cranes, dollies, telescopic lenses, air-views take advantage of this omnipotence to cover more and more difficult situations. The camera glides through walls, hesitates above the crowd, moves easily in dark places, magnifies a finger nail. It is ubiquitous but unseen.

Thus the camera makes participants of its audience, for it invests them with super-human privileges, makes *them* omnipotent, ubiquitous, and from this property the special character of cinema is derived. The audience sees with its mechanical eye and hears with its mechanical ear; both together compose its peculiar nature: the relentless necessity for action that keeps it hovering over and around and among its subjects in order to assert its hegemony. The camera takes literal possession of the spectator, thrusts him into the plot, free of it yet fixed in his seat, always subject to the illusion of virtuosity. The subdued spectator entranced by the camera's focus is perennially the stranger at court: expectant, happy, fearful by turns, often dismayed. Through this coercion of the audience the movies absorb the spectator into the film strip version; he too becomes interchangeable with the actors (or animals), literally as well as symbolically, for it is their behaviour and appearance values which he has been emulating in his workday life. By destroying the psychological and esthetic distance between the audience and its theatre screen the Hollywood film identifies actor and spectator. This identity is particularly emphatic, as Tyler has noted, in the sensual technicolour dreams which wind in and out of the theatre circuits like sacred tribal pythons on travelling display. The

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more complete the metamorphosis the more dubious the outside world becomes. The lightning of a talent hunt may strike anywhere; conversely: today an actor, tomorrow back to the shop.

Film character and story must exemplify the qualities of the camera-eye perspective: the free-wheeling virtuosity, flow and dissolve of action, the non-stop tempo. The persistent problem of expressing these characteristics has been variously solved and avoided. One of the advantages of the crime film over the mere action movie is that its protagonists can be driven by an apparently inner demonism; actually this is the effect, in large part, of the camera's ability to chase an image across the screen. Another simple solution lies in the cartoon. Animals have long been its stock in trade and human beings, when used, have the same status as animals. Both are completely controlled by the animator. The complete mechanization of the cartoon from start to finish was early expressed in a production formula, the comedy-chase, which satisfied the elementary mechanical drive of the cinema but soon degenerated into the chase alone, for it could be manufactured wholesale whereas the comedy couldn't. Similarly, early slapstick comedies were constructed almost exclusively on this pattern; they had all the economy of good animation. Action was their essence. Until sound-dialogue had developed to the point of being a form of action it was unnecessary to them, and when it had, the slapstick of dialogue replaced the more active variety.

Many typical results of the Hollywood myth have become tightly interlaced with each other: the destruction of psychological distance has aided, and been encouraged by, the narcissism of Hollywood. The upper middle class film-makers (whose financial rewards are such that willy-nilly they all share this background) produce mainly for the economic groups beneath them, groups which can aspire naïvely to money values, whereas the producers themselves can no longer actually enjoy their prestige and benefits except through the self-deception of their own films. In these they are narcissistic, embracing themselves through the audience. A kind of movie within a movie thus goes on in many Hollywood films: the audience reaction to the film is considered in its production and exploited before its release. Preference polls, opinion sampling, laugh meters are often used to manufacture the specific kind of film most ardently desired by the purchaser. The reaction-clues planted in a movie are usually of the simplest sort. A perennial favorite is the prolonged laughter given to the screen comic by his on-screen audience in the magical hope of its being confirmed by the actual theatre public; the latter "produce" the film almost as much as the director. A film becomes an experience in which the audience participates from production to screening. Their wishing made the film so, and the wish and the screen fantasy are closely related.

The crime-movie, the Western horse-opera, the slapstick comedy, the cartoon have at least one property in common: they all present *de-humanized* versions of personality. That is, they are each concerned with a specific kind of human behavior in highly restrictive situations in which no deviation from

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a standard response is permitted or expected, any more than in the reaction of insects to their customary stimuli. The "trigger finger" of the horse-opera hero expresses this very well; given a gun the hero must use it.

Iris Barry points out that "Griffith and Ince . . . taught the Scandinavians to use an isolated face or gesture as a unit of expression rather than (as on the stage), the actor." In a film the emphasis, for a variety of reasons, must fall on the action, not on the character, and this is precisely what has culminated in the animated cartoon. A motion picture film cannot be merely a collection of photographs which when thumbed through quickly seem to represent a walking man. The camera leaves the man behind to anticipate his destination, returns at his feet, washes him off the screen. He lives through a queer sort of time: in flashbacks, cross cuts, pan shots, fade-aways; his represented continuity is submerged to the sensations of the camera-eye, and we must construct him from a great variety of visual sources. His screen life is a fitful procedure, a transaction of events, just as is his screen image itself.

Stage plays are written for definite space-time orientations, for the actions of characters who are taken to be kinds of people or personalities. The drama has been the repository of ethical values revolving about the notion of "person," engaged with concepts like fate, justice, evil, happiness. The decline of public interest in traditional statements of these concepts and values has been mirrored in the decline of the characters, actions, and plays embodying them. It has become increasingly difficult to visualize such people on the stage, to write certain kinds of plays. What I should like to suggest is that this problem of character creation is largely irrelevant to the screen, and that this may help to explain in part why the cinema is fundamentally congenial to us, has a mass-base whereas the theatre has not. On the stage an actor is a traditionally exaggerated man whom the audience watches to see what he will do. On the screen an actor is simply a narrowing of our attention as a result of the camera focus; we wait to see what the camera will do—to us as well as to the actor, because the absence of the stage's psychological distance means that on the screen we no longer identify with a stage man but with the film camera.

The window-stage with its fixed conventional point of view means, to use a distinction popular with school teachers, that the author decides whether the stage characters are to be larger, equal to, or smaller than life (the audience). For the ubiquitous camera which banishes the window convention more thoroughly than any experimental stage-craft can, the point of view is temporally and spatially fluid. The camera even attempts to be psychically fluid, to shift from its customary third person narration to first person with the resulting limitations and privileges (*Lady in the Lake*); unfortunately, the restrictions on the camera's freedom of action in first person films is so great that the psychological extension is more than offset by the temporal and spatial contraction. The solution has been to utilize devices like the flashback that lead from the voice of a narrator to a third person account of his actions. Some films, like *Dr. Caligari's Cabinet*, make use of a first person script and third person narra-

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tion by the camera. This "impersonality" of film viewpoint where the camera is always outside looking in, is a constant frustration to its otherwise unlimited powers. Technical developments in Hollywood films have overcome every obstacle but one: the fact that we cannot have the sense-data possessed by minds other than our own.

The audience shares this frustration with the camera since they go where it goes, but they also share the camera's impersonality and omnipotence with regard to the film characters. In this way the latter are smaller than life, than the audience, and it becomes difficult to see how they could be larger. If the camera identifies itself with the more limited perspective of one actor it slips into the first person fallacy; if not, it remains the Ubiquitous Eye. Since the audience identifies with the camera their relationship to the cast is formed by the terms through which they are related. The screen characters could be equal to the audience (life) only if the camera imitated the fixed stage. If films were photographed plays, as many so-called movies actually are today, and made no more than a theatrical use of the camera, merely switched from speaker to speaker, examined sets, created an extended stage (like those giant productions of musical comedy), no typically film problems would arise.

The cinema's purely mechanical limitations and abilities help create its esthetic ones, both in the film genus proper and its Hollywood species. The depersonalizing process of the film has been thoroughly exploited by Hollywood in the slapstick cartoon, a form which later substituted words for blows and became the modern wise-crack comedy. Both satisfy the film's destructive function in their deflation of lost ritual and rite, their sacrament shattering role, the submersion of older social patterns in favor of comic anarchy. Much of this humor depends on the literalness with which the function is carried out; it leads from custard pies and smashed furniture to character assassination, the disintegrated marriage, and the quaking pillars of society; amid these scenes of his own necessary carnage the wise-cracking comedian flourishes. Hollywood has thus utilized the de-personalizing tendency of the medium to express the de-humanizing violence inherent in certain areas of American behavior, but the two tendencies may be quite distinct; the former is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the latter. Similarly the true horse-opera takes place in a rather feebly imagined Never-never land; that is, it can be given a locale and time as required, though the action is essentially fabulous. Its conventions are much more amenable to surrealistic than historical treatment (see for example, the Western sequence in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*), as are all films. The cowboy trappings are Hollywood's contribution from its own myth, the non-historical elements belong to the genus of the film.

Because of its peculiar properties cinema is anti-historical. The spatio-temporal fluidity, the visual and auditory omnipotence that produce the film's de-personalization of the actor and its psychological immediacy for the audience mean that the conditions for historical drama or biography cannot be met; the sense of history is precisely what the camera dissolves. One of the requirements

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for historical appreciation is a consciousness of difference between Then and Now, and the whole nature of the film lies in its power to obliterate this difference, and this awareness. The construction of historical character is subject, of course, to the same difficulties as is film character in general. Without characters in the stage sense, except those smaller than life (the animals), historical biography and drama become impossible. The anti-historical quality of cinema is well demonstrated by exaggeration in Guitry's *Pearls of the Crown* where film techniques like rapid cross-cutting reduce historical succession to meaninglessness. Episode follows episode arbitrarily and what knits them together has very little to do with their historical relationships. The total failure of the costume play on the screen has been somewhat disguised in European films by the amount of stage intelligence at work: rôle, situation, and dialogue often have been handled with a scrupulous appreciation for the conditions of historical drama. Many French pictures have utilized this stage intelligence to a high degree, but in neither its historical nor its contemporary version has this in itself produced good film, simply because no use is made of cinematic properties.

Another kind of uncinematic intelligence has been busy with experimental pictures. In many of these (*Fall of the House of Usher, Le Chien Andalou, Dreams that Money Can Buy,* for instance) the tendency is to bring the material to the camera conveniently parked nearby and pass it in front of the lens as though the audience were a customer buying a suit. A film, however, is not made by our interest in Freudian analysis or modern art or the spectator's low resistance to the sight of technicolor blood, and not at all by assaults on the lens. It is made by what the camera *does,* and if the camera does nothing it isn't made. An experimental film is not produced by merely using an unconventional theme, but by an experimental treatment: a costume play used as the basis of a genuine film should be unrecognizable in its metamorphosis.

If the preceding argument is at all satisfactory, motion pictures which depend wholly on plot and character seem doomed from their inception. A "humanistic" actor involves both himself and history in a struggle with the camera's demands, he sets up an opposition of "ordinary reality" against the "reality" of the screen which has another life to display than that of the flesh and blood actors. Stage drama and tragedy require protagonists of enough stature to influence, or at least understand, the events in which they participate. The screen's characters cannot grow that large; its only larger than life characters are literal ones, like King Kong or Frankenstein's monster, because the camera and hence, the audience, directs their fate and destiny. Shakespeare cannot be conveyed to the screen intact any more than can Dante; a role like Hamlet brings up the camera's first person difficulties in their acutest form, while the stage language of tragedy operates almost independently of what can occur on the screen. The importance of language to action in the film is the reverse of what it is on the stage; a play can be read while a film-script cannot; the film can be merely seen, the play must be heard as well. Hamlet's

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soliloquies are either pure sound track accompanied by photographs of a reciting actor or they are the camera's soliloquies as it begins to move. In order for the camera to present a film version of Shakespeare's language it would have to present its visual equivalent, and this would be less analogous still than translation into a foreign language. Actual screen productions of Shakespeare (the archetypes of all filmed plays) have ranged from colossal pageants like Olivier's *Henry V*, which belonged in an open air stadium, to Hollywood culture movies (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) which represent the gnawings of conscience in the movie-makers.

There are so many inessential growths attached to cinema that those things it does well are submerged in those it does *not*: tragedy, noble drama, the drawing room comedy or its bedroom variant, literary whimsy, cultured fairy tales, Broadway musicals, operas, sound-track exercises in "serious music," all "intelligent" explanatory and educational movies. Those it has done well—certain documentaries, the horse-opera, slapstick comedy, gangster films, melodrama, animated cartoons, many of the French, Russian, German and Scandinavian pictures, experiments in the abstract, the irrational, in dance forms—represent the smallest part of what can be done.

The film-situation is a ritual and rite for the audience, even to the darkness of the theatre, the communal preparations, the expectancy. Perhaps, then, like the ceremonial dance and the religious effort everywhere, it can most easily find its direct subject matter in myth and mythic symbols, in the sub-threshold areas of consciousness. Its drama and themes need not be articulated verbally as in stage literature, for sound *dialogue* is not properly speaking within the medium; or rather dialogue might play the part James suggested for the illustrations to his novels: "it should have no direct bearing upon or relieve the medium of any responsibility itself." The dramatic articulation of film must be in terms of visual movement. This is why we can dismiss so lightly from the film, stage character, stage drama, and all their accessories. Film is most like an extended and extensive dance, an esthetic order imposed on movement wherever it occurs, whatever its vehicle. The camera pursues the abstract line of movement, tension and release, that works itself through the reels despite the subject; like the organizing geometry of a painting the camera hunts a thread of order across the screen, and the level at which film really operates is as far below plot, character, the well-rounded ending, as the myth of the Fall is beneath the tale of Adam and Eve. The thread of order may be followed as rapidly as the nearest chase in an animated cartoon and with as much care of ostensible structure—the film's excuse—as in Jonson, or it may be as apparently neglected as in the horse-opera, but film is actually a kind of ballet, with equally strict conventions of what happens to those caught up in its grasp. It is also a form of possession for the audience (we possess the camera's life), a new conception of our powers, and wanted or not, drives out the Graeco-Christian psyche from the theatre and from our lives as inevitably as the tractor replaces the horse.

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FREDERICK MORGAN

Theater Chronicle

WRITING OF LAST SPRING'S unhappy production of Christopher Fry's *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, I made the point that, for a fair test of how the Broadway audience would react to a new play written in unmistakably poetic language, we should have to await the importation of *The Lady's Not For Burning*. Now *The Lady* is, of course, a great success, and deservedly so: the excellence of the acting, the sureness of touch in the presentation as a whole, not to speak of the play's own merits, make this, of the productions discussed here, the one not to have missed.

There is a peculiar kind of snobbery at work among certain would-be "avant-garde" critics that would maintain that no play which is a Broadway success can possibly be a good one. Thus, the popularity of *The Cocktail Party* is taken as proof of the unintelligent doctrinaire contention that this play is "weak" or "watered-down" Eliot. This position, with which *Partisan Review* has notably associated itself, is both stupid and dangerous, for it represents a surrender of the audience to the philistines, by persons who should know better. Granted that Broadway is thoroughly corrupt, that unmitigated trash is most likely to "pay off," it is still at least *possible* for a very good play (which I should maintain *The Cocktail Party* is) to enjoy a long run, just as a very good novel occasionally becomes a best-seller. The audience has been conditioned to applaud trash, but no audience can be conditioned beyond redemption: there is always the possibility and the hope, however faint, that it will applaud merit. It is this hope that persons who care for a healthy theater must work with, and it is noteworthy that those who would abandon it are not themselves writing plays or doing anything noticeable towards having good ones produced.

I do not contend by all this that the success of *The Lady* proves that any good play will succeed, or that I expect anything like a reform to take place on Broadway. All it proves is that worthwhile work, even written in verse, is not necessarily doomed to failure; and that there is no reason why we should not, in this country,—granted some perseverance and good-will—develop a respectable tradition for the producing of good plays: one at least as effective as what we already have in Opera and Ballet. In the case of *The Lady*, it must be granted that several factors combined to make the audience more receptive than it might otherwise have been: the advance publicity, the prestige of John Gielgud, the glamor that tends to surround all artistic importations from Britain whether or not they deserve it. It is quite likely that many went to the play convinced ahead of time that they should and would like it. Add to this

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the extraordinary suavity and polish of the production, its visual excellence, the presence of accomplished performers who have been trained in a tradition that encompasses more than post-Ibsen naturalism, and who *know how to speak poetry*—it is clear that the road was smoothed of many obstacles. Another play might not be so fortunate in the circumstances of its production, or, if it were based on insights and attitudes more profound or complex than those underlying *The Lady*, it might be harder to "take." The fact remains that the Broadway audience displayed some degree of adaptability in accepting this play; given time and opportunity, it might well accept more and better.

The Lady is interesting, like all of Fry's work, in that it combines a general outline that is broad and simple with a great elaboration and involvement at the verbal level. We have, in the imaginary year 1400, a soldier home from the wars, who arrives in the small town of Cool Clary at the moment the natives are inaugurating a witch-hunt. The soldier, embittered of the world, is bent on being hanged, and insists on confessing to imaginary crimes; the young and beautiful "witch," on the other hand, eager for life, is condemned to burn; for the authorities, in the persons of the local mayor and judge, insist on her guilt at the same time that they refuse to take seriously the soldier's "crimes." The resolution comes, in a scene of inspired low-comedy, with the appearance of the "rag-and-bones" man whom the witch was supposed to have transformed into a dog. The case against her evaporates; at the final curtain, the lovers prepare to depart into the dawning day—the witch free, but cut off from her past, the soldier reconciled to living by his love for her. The underlying attitude to all this is a simple and familiar one: the acceptance of life as mystery, the recognition that with all its imperfections it is capable of being redeemed by love. Opposed to life is the sterile and withered realm of custom, rote and regulation. That Mr. Fry is on the side of life and love, without subjecting his acceptance to too rigorous a scrutiny, makes the play, I think, easier for the average audience to "take" than might otherwise be expected. The details of the verse may be missed, but the general intention is always present as something familiar and reassuring. This is not, in short, a play calculated to disturb anyone; the soldier's determination to die, proceeding not from a particular event but from a sort of generalized disgust, is not felt as even potentially tragic, but as fantastic and perverse (it is also, of course, a ruse to divert attention from the witch). Similarly, the opponents of the hero and heroine are not seen as evil, but merely as fussy and ridiculous; as *not alive*, as having an official existence only. The question is one of limitation and not, certainly, of falsification. What I have called Fry's underlying attitude has unquestionable validity. It is responsible for the charm, the wit and the beauty of this play that so successfully embodies it. But taken by itself alone, it grips our experience at only a certain depth. This, I think, is what accounts for my feeling that *The Lady* is a minor work, although, within its limitation and with a

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reservation that will appear, a fine one. It has all the softer virtues, in plenty; but it seems to lack the iron, the sting and the moral profundity that are characteristic of major accomplishment.

In his recent article on Fry in these pages[1], William Arrowsmith has put his finger on the essential qualities of the verse when he speaks of its "open-cast" texture, "the laddering of effects toward an over-all tonal roof," and the need for it to strengthen itself by self-mockery. It is individualized and all-of-a-piece, exuberant, but seldom precious or inflated. In its continuous self-elaboration, however, it tends to sacrifice dramatic impact in the interests of a kind of lyrical portrayal of states of mind. This brings me to a final criticism, anticipated by Mr. Arrowsmith: *The Lady* is not fully, nor even (considering its other merits) adequately realized in dramatic terms. The poetry, good as it is, is called on to do too much work. There is very little action; and what there is does not of itself clinch anything dramatically, but serves as a frame for conversation (the "rag-and-bones" man scene is the one exception). Thus the play seems static; inevitably—despite the general brilliance of the conversation—one is aware of a degree of monotony. Fry is genuinely a dramatic poet, in the sense that his poetry presents itself naturally as "spoken" by characters who find themselves in particular situations. He needs, however, to widen his vision of the situation itself; to learn to exploit it dramatically as well as verbally. By so doing he could make better use of the fine instrument his verse undoubtedly is—and his outlook might gain in depth, complexity and power.

Fry was also represented on Broadway this season as translator of Jean Anouilh's *L'Invitation au chateau. Ring Round the Moon,* as the English version is titled, is not a play of any great stature or consequence; but as an "entertainment" (or "Charade with Music," as Fry has called it)—which is all it sets out to be—it was entirely successful in the recent fine production by Gilbert Miller. The time is the Spring of 1912, in the lost Eden of the days before the first war. The place is the Winter Garden at the chateau of Madame Desmermortes, a brilliant and wealthy old lady—now confined to a wheel-chair—who personifies all the worldy charm and glamor of an *ancien régime.* The occasion is a great ball; the action carries us through from the first preparations to the dawn of the following day, and centers on the old lady's nephews, twin brothers both played by the same actor. The one, gentle and retiring, suffers from a hopeless attachment to a wealthy heiress; the other, a charming but selfish "man about town," sets out to cure his brother by inviting to the ball, with instructions to dazzle, a poor but beautiful ballet-dancer from Paris,

[1] "English Verse Drama: Christopher Fry," THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. III, No. 2, Summer, 1950. Mr. Arrowsmith's insight into Fry's language as an extension of his theme is very much to the point here.

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whom he palms off as the niece of a friend. After a series of complications and discoveries, the dancer, who has fallen in love with the more dashing brother, learns to see him for what he is; and all ends happily, under the watchful eyes of the old lady, as each twin finds his proper mate. None of this is meant to be taken very seriously; the social comment is muted, the wit gentle, without cutting edge. The success of the play within its modest ambition is attributable to Anouilh's light but sure touch, which keeps the situation happily in focus—his good taste, precluding falsity or pretension—and his fine sense of *movement*: the action never lags, something entertaining is always going on, each of the characters has his "bit" to perform. Fry's (prose) translation is excellent: clear and unobtrusive, it brings over the wit and elegance of the original. The performers were uniformly good; the set a masterpiece.

The theme of Tennessee Williams' new play has, in its broadest implications, something in common with that of *The Lady's Not For Burning*. A woman, in this case, is to be won from an allegiance to death. But in the actual working-out, all resemblance comes to an end. *The Rose Tattoo,* I am afraid, must be taken as the vulgar and opportunistic production of a common-place mind. The heroine is a passionate (and so conventionally "passionate"—Mr. Williams had his eye on a role for Anna Magnani) Sicilian woman, living in a small settlement on the Gulf Coast. In the first act, we find her jealously attached to the memory of her dead husband, who had in his life, it seems, given her perfect satisfaction, and whose ashes she has preserved in an urn that stands next to a statue of the Virgin—behavior, one would add, hardly characteristic of Sicilian Catholics. It develops, however, that her husband, just before his death, had been indulging in an affair with another woman; while the widow is becoming convinced of this (the motivation is entirely *un*convincing, by the way), she comes across an oafish truck-driver whose "body" (*sic*) reminds her of that of her husband. Since acceptance of life, for Mr. Williams, is simply an acceptance—with a vengeance—of sex, we find her at the climax smashing the urn (a great surprise, that!) and taking the truck-driver to bed. The treatment throughout is altogether shallow and sensational, without dignity or understanding. Mr. Williams' earlier plays, for all their trashiness, were written out of a personal obsession that gave them a certain rudimentary force; but he has seemed all along to lack the insight and intelligence to put this to good use in his writing. In the new play, practically nothing of interest remains: it is all spurious and warmed-over, in the accepted tradition of Broadway "realism."

Stepping still deeper into the abyss, we come next to John van Druten's *Bell, Book and Candle*—high-powered trash that is Broadway at its most typical. The utter vacuity and deadness of this play are matched only by the

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effrontery with which it serves up its "smart" attitudes and assumes the connivance of its audience. Plays of this caliber are frequently referred to as "good theater," presumably meaning that they have been put together neatly according to formula. The important question, to my mind, is whether the formula itself has anything to convey to a self-respecting audience, or whether it is a mere reworking of shallow and worn-out attitudes. All that one finds in Mr. van Druten's play is an alley-cat morality masquerading behind a veneer of New York swank; there is a total lack of anything remotely resembling sincerity, intelligence or genuine emotion. For humor, the play relies on endless tedious repetitions of an initial assumption—having to do with witches and wizards in New York apartments—that is never made funny or interesting. Rex Harrison and Lilli Palmer can be delightful performers on occasion, but good acting in a tawdry play, I must insist, is sheer waste; here, in fact, the competence of the acting makes the empty slickness of the play all the more deadly. At any rate, there is nothing any actor could do to redeem *Bell, Book and Candle* from being a completely dull and offensive bore.

It is refreshing, after such a smirking play, to turn to the openness and brutality of Restoration Comedy. Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* is one of the better plays of its time, although full of slow spots that must be gotten over quickly and deftly if the play is to succeed to-day. The recent Theatre Guild revival was fortunate in the presence of Cyril Ritchard as Foppington, for most of the scenes that have retained their comic vitality are centered on this role, and it was performed with great wit and flair. The supporting cast was not, however, particularly good, and the rather heavy-handed production did not measure up to the one I saw in London in 1948, in which Mr. Ritchard also played. The action involving Loveless and Amanda, for example, was not realized as fully as it should have been, and the scenes in Sir Tunbelly Clumsy's Manor, which seemed hilariously funny in the London production, were robbed of much of their comic potentiality by an unimaginative reliance on slapstick, combined with weak performances by Sir Tunbelly and Miss Hoyden.

A far better revival was that of *The Beggar's Opera* put on by the Interplayers last summer and fall at the Carnegie Recital Hall. This production was both faithful and full of life; through it all shone the bitter insight and brutal honesty that make this play the greatest in English of its century. The central roles of Macheath, Polly and Lucy were admirably played and sung, the supporting cast was thoroughly competent, the adaptation of the traditional airs by Mark Bucci, and his incidental music, were to my ear entirely in keeping with the spirit of the play. This exuberant and intelligent production by an off-Broadway group was a major achievement; it provided a splendid evening's entertainment, and establishes the Interplayers as a group to be reckoned with and followed with attention in the future.

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There remain on my list the recent revival of *King Lear* by Robert L. Joseph and Alexander H. Cohen, the ANTA production of *Peer Gynt*, in a version by Paul Green, and Sidney Kingsley's adaptation of Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, put on by the Playwrights' Company. The first two, at least, were genuinely ambitious undertakings.

The *Lear*, with Louis Calhern in the title role, was of uneven merit, but on the whole, I think, deserving of praise. First, because it was intelligently directed and faithful to the intent of the original, with few concessions made in the direction of popularization. Secondly, because it was admirably staged. The sets were simple and did not get in the way, and the action was allowed to flow from scene to scene without impediment. Thus the tempo of the production, so important in Shakespeare, was kept alive. The cuts and rearrangements were minor, and not really objectionable, although not always, in my opinion, necessary. If I have yet to see a production of *Lear* that seemed close to adequate, I have yet to see one that has not taught me something—which is one reason why I am grateful to anyone who will produce the play with a modicum of intelligence and good-will. In the present instance, it was the scenes on the heath which came through, to me at least, with great power and a sense of revelation. Unfortunately, the same level of excellence was not maintained throughout: there is generally a considerable lessening of tension in the fourth act of a Shakespearean tragedy, and the problem is to keep this sudden relaxation from altogether dissipating the audience's grip on the play. I felt here that matters never really picked up after the blinding scene (which was magnificently done); the play moved along to its conclusion in rather routine fashion. The spottiness of the acting may have had something to do with this: the Goneril and the Edmund, for example, were wholly inadequate to roles that demand playing of great stature and force. It is they, after all, who keep the play in motion after the first scene, and who are at the center of its action if not of its interest. For the rest, Norman Lloyd's brilliant and touching Fool was outstanding, while Arnold Moss played Gloucester with his customary insight and authority. Wesley Addy was fine as "Poor Tom" in the scenes on the heath, but very weak in his performance as Edgar and in the crucial scenes with the blinded Gloucester. Mr. Calhern himself had his good moments, particularly in the earlier scenes in which Lear begins to break down; but his portrayal lost stature as the play progressed. At times he seemed to abstract himself too much from the sense of his lines, while relying excessively on certain vocal mannerisms to portray Lear's weakness. Granting the enormous difficulty of the role, however, Mr. Calhern did a reasonably creditable job, and as American productions of Shakespeare go, this was a reasonably good one.

Although one should be grateful, I suppose, for any opportunity to see *Peer Gynt*, the ANTA production seemed to me a rather complete failure. The approach lacked understanding, and the play itself presents enormous difficulties

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of a rather special sort. Ibsen wrote *Peer Gynt* in verse; any translation, inevitably—and a prose translation, particularly—will lose much of the texture of the original. Mr. Green tells us, in an article in the *New York Times*, that he based his "American" version on a close interlinear version made by a friend, rewording it into "somewhat easy colloquial speech." This is hardly the way to produce a translation that will be alive to any degree approaching the original, although miracles can happen. At any rate, Mr. Green's translation of a translation is probably close to Ibsen only in respect to literal rendition; as prose, it sounded loose-knit and undistinguished, incapable, I should suspect, of conveying the overtones and larger meanings which one presumes are present in the original. What seems to be a second major difficulty involves a criticism of the play as Ibsen wrote it, and on this no one can speak with authority who lacks, along with Mr. Green and me, direct contact with it in the original language. But I should guess, on the admittedly inadequate basis of the translations I have read, that *Peer Gynt* is dramatically uneven. Certain scenes stand out with great force and definition, but others seem discursive and undramatic, or even—as in the episodes on the Moroccan coast and in the Cairo mad-house—second-rate. (By comparison with the rest of the play, these two scenes seem undeniably flat, shallow and full of topicalities that are no longer of dramatic interest; they failed entirely to come across in this production.) The play has great magnificence of scope and intention, then, but also seems rambling and disconnected, as if it had only been partially conceived in dramatic terms. This point of view is supported, of course, by the various criticisms which have been made to the effect that *Peer Gynt* is successful as a "poem" rather than as a "play." This brings us to the third major difficulty, that of establishing a controlling "tone." Ibsen's attitude towards his hero and his hero's world is very complex. He satirizes Peer and his aspirations, but sympathizes with them as well; there is an alternation of high seriousness with almost frivolous mockery. It is in this connection particularly, I think, that we miss the overtones that would be present in the original verse. In the present production, at any rate, there was no sense of a consistent attitude underlying the changes of tone, but rather a general pervasive uncertainty and lack of grip.

Not much then, unfortunately, came across. The final scenes did not convince[2], although one felt the potential presence of something very fine. The troll-scene, which gave everyone concerned an opportunity to shine, came out limp and unimaginative, with doleful choreography by Valerie Bettis. The episode with Anitra, on the other hand, was reduced to sheer burlesque, an oversimplification. The cast seemed to have little comprehension of what was going on; John Garfield, as Peer, failed generally to convince me that he was anybody

[2]Extensive cutting in the latter half of the play probably did not help matters. The shipwreck scene, for one, is surely essential, and I particularly regretted the paring-down of the pastor's magnificent speech in the last act.

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but John Garfield. It was only in the scene of Ase's death that this production, and Mr. Garfield with it, seemed to come to life, and to touch for a moment on a reality that, for the most part, remained well hidden.

When someone adapts a novel to the stage, we may properly ask him his reason. Has the novel suggested to the dramatist something that *demands* to be recreated in dramatic form? Or does it merely supply him with the convenience of a ready-made situation or attitude on which he hopes to capitalize? If the latter is the case, and it generally is, the play will simply aspire to reproduce the novel; at best, it can have no dramatic value, but only an ancillary interest as commentary. In other words, if the novel was worth dramatizing in the first place, one would still do better to read *it*. This is the situation with the current *Darkness at Noon*. The production is well enough staged—it is interesting to see prison walls melt away to disclose scenes from Rubashov's past into which he can step from his cell—but in the proper sense this is no play at all. There is no action, but only demonstration, and a waiting for the end. The effect of the flash-back technique is to redouble the awareness that one is seeing a mere transcript. Nor does Koestler's dialectic gain in impressiveness by being argued out verbally by Claude Rains, as Rubashov, and Alexander Scourby, as the commandant Ivanoff; for not one of the characters in the play has been grasped dramatically. They are nothing but walking illustrations of the personages in the novel. In fact, the play points up many of the weaknesses which are also present in the novel, although less evident there. This production, well-intentioned but lacking a *raison d'etre*, ends in tedium and inconsequence.

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JOSEPH KERMAN

Roger Sessions

As one hears over and again that Roger Sessions is the high-minded, serious, cerebral, and granitic American composer, one wonders exactly what compliments and derogations all these terms can imply. First, perhaps, that he is the one American with the strength and integrity to see clearly the musical challenge of the time, and to cope with it uncompromisingly; such a judgment stands him up with the two or three recognized contemporary masters, and earns him our intense sympathetic consideration, without making any criticism of his art. But the further implication that his work is recondite, cold, and unconcerned with the expressive functions of music, this does indeed criticize, inconsistently, and I think absurdly. Such suggestions are more than enough to dam up performances of the relatively few works that he has produced. From the time he left the east coast, during the war, until just recently, he might as well have been forgotten here, even though in California he was apparently becoming a force. Only during the last year or two has a new symphony been broadcast, recorded, and given prizes,[1] several older works performed, a set of notable lectures delivered and printed,[2] and a formal textbook in harmony prepared as though to symbolize the influence of his teaching.[3]

Sessions' convictions about music and his place in it are stated unequivocally in the six lectures which are assembled as *The Musical Experience*. Much is remarkable about this book: its breadth of scope, its refusal to skim, its sense of perspective and control, its sophisticated concentration on essentials. We are offered no technical hobby-horses or half-digested philosophies, none of those endearing polemic missions. Indeed, there is so much in the book that is right and cogent, so persuasive a show of system, and so much forcible and sensible argument, that it is certain to be taken seriously as a musical aesthetic. One could make a far worse choice, but one had better see that on this plane the discussion is neither fully responsible nor "profound," as these words would

[1]SYMPHONY NO. 2 (1946): score, G. Schirmer. $3.50; recording by Mitropoulos and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. Columbia ML-2120. $3.85.

[2]THE MUSICAL EXPERIENCE OF COMPOSER, PERFORMER, LISTENER. Princeton. $2.50.

[3]HARMONIC PRACTICE. Harcourt, Brace. (Publication announced for May 1951.) "The study of harmony is not primarily training in writing, but training in hearing"; so it is the business of the listener as well as the performer and the composer. The two most impressive emphases in the approach—each characteristic of the writer—are on the working of harmony on the largest scale, over an entire composition, and on the development of relevant present practice from the tradition. The final chapter is a wonderful introduction, in technical but general terms, to the points of departure of contemporary harmony.

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be applied to a dissertation by an aesthetician or a critic. Sessions was really more interested in entrenching his ideas than in arguing them out; he was not ready to go to all the trouble of eliminating inconsistencies, disposing of the other view, or, on a lower level, of expanding his original brief presentation, or even rewriting the lectures decently. As a result the book is less effective than it should have been, which is a pity in view of the squareness of the attack on many of the questions that arise.

Of these, the most fundamental is the nature of musical expression and communication, which is dealt with forcefully in an exposition similar to that of Susanne K. Langer, in *Philosophy in a New Key* and in "The Primary Illusions and the Great Orders of Art."[4] Sessions emphasizes that the raw materials of music are human facts; not acoustical facts, nor sounds interrelated into patterns of pitch and rhythm (as some say), nor even the traditional elements of melody, harmony, and rhythm, except as these already stand for basic human reactions. Thus music is essentially and necessarily expressive; and the flavor of the book comes from Sessions' devotion to this truism and his tough determination to think it through. Communication from composer to listener is posited on their common awareness of certain experiences, which exist below the level of specific emotional situations. Music "animates the emotion"—this is a happy phrase; it symbolizes a sequence of human gestures which form the stuff of conscious emotional currents. To Sessions the meaning of a musical phrase, or a composition, is precise, clear, and single. The listener's response to it is a living-through of the train of gestures represented, and is active to this extent, if to no other. He may simplify (I would say coarsen) the gestures by crystallizing them around some personal emotional association; and in this way two listeners can obtain differing (I would say defective) experiences from a composition whose meaning is unique.

Naturally Mrs. Langer's statement of this whole view is more precise and persuasive, but Sessions' has a certain very welcome authority, as coming from a leading composer. Composition is commonly taken today as an increasingly esoteric technical matter, into which expression, if considered at all, is supposed to enter by some unintelligible transformation. Actually the problem of present music, as of all music, is one of expression, not of technique, and analyses of the procedures alone do nothing more than lay a groundwork. Of course, composers are not psychologists; their work is expressive without deliberate study, sometimes even in spite of their theories and avowals; but I cannot suppose that a man is any the worse for bringing his mind to bear on the central issue of his job. Sessions is one composer who knows what he is really doing.

It is this knowledge that underlies his understanding of music; the founda-

[4]THE HUDSON REVIEW, III-2, Summer 1950.

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tion is firm. But Sessions is less sure as he goes on to the relationship between the musical experiences of composer, performer and listener, a matter so crucial for the rest of the argument that it was evidently worth jamming into the title. Any interpretation of this relationship has to take into consideration the plain fact that however exact the meaning of a musical composition, its successive incarnations in performances and in the minds of listeners, deviate more or less from the original expression. But one can take this alienation in several ways. For me, it is an unavoidable imperfection, an index of our failure to grasp that original meaning; for Sessions, to the contrary, it is an essential factor in the vitality of the musical experience. The musical experience is an "activity," and music has to "live," through "constant renewal." What this means is best explained in these sentences:

> First of all, the composer, the performer, and the listener are in a certain sense collaborators in a total musical experience, to which each makes his individual contribution. Secondly, not only are the performer and the listener, in a real sense, re-experiencing and re-creating the musical thought of the composer, but they are, also in a real sense, adding to it.

Music is surely re-experienced; but when there is talk of recreating and "in a real sense, adding to it," the implication has to be taken all the way—alteration, that is distortion, of the original precise meaning, which is no longer the generator but a collaborator in the total experience. I would say that the musical expression is fixed totally by the composer, that the listener's re-experience is passive rather than creative, and frankly incomplete, and that whatever is added is unessential, irrelevant, and mischievous. Remarking that a recorded performance is in a sense lifeless, since there is no spontaneity in its reproduction of musical gestures, Sessions concludes:

> When the music ceases to be fresh for us in this sense, it ceases to be alive, and we can say in the most real sense that it ceases to be music.

Not at all: "in the most real sense" it remains music; the sense in which the thing is dead is patently *less* real. To his stubbornly pragmatic view may be opposed the idealistic one: in the most real sense music is alive in the score, alive in the composer's head before he writes it down, alive once it becomes an organized meaningful train of symbols, whether or not they are renewed or communicated. For this listener, at least, the composer has a much more central role than for Roger Sessions.

For him the performer has a very large role:

> The music is not totally present, the idea of the composer is not fully expressed, in any single performance, actual or even conceivable, but rather in the sum of all possible performances.

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Rather, the idea of the composer is to be abstracted from all possible performances. Sessions' discussion of the performer is obscured at first by a shrewd point made at the expense of pedestrian performances. He is quite right in noting that on the score the composer can indicate only imperfectly the nuance of his music, and that the performer has to translate the marks on the page not into sounds alone, but into musical phraseology, into their correct musical gestures. As a score is reproduced, the agent of this reproduction is the performer's awareness of the nature of musical symbolism. However this is by no means the same thing as saying:

> The agent of this re-creation is the imagination of the performer, or, if you will, his "personality." It is his task, and I believe his whole task, to apply his imagination to discovering the musical gestures inherent in the composer's text, and then to reproducing them according to his own lights; that is, with fullest participation on his own part.

Almost everybody agrees that mechanical performance will spoil music—the point was even made in my last review for this magazine. But it is at least as fatal to tell a performer that he is to collaborate, that style, tradition, and historical evidence are useless, and that the proper thing is to follow his own conviction. We should have a fine gallery of Handel, Brahms, and Sessions, all snapped through the same miserable filter. A hedging insistence on the necessity of both "fidelity" and "conviction" at first bemuses the reader, then informs him that things are not as clear as the tone of injured common sense suggests. It is naive to imagine that, under the sway of conviction as it is here described, fidelity as anyone else would use the term can still be maintained.

Sessions' lecture on the composer is naturally most interesting in connection with his own work, as we shall see. His discussion of the listener does not develop the idea of the collaborator-role, as is done so boldly with the performer. On the critic, he is sound and trenchant—he himself used to set an unnaturally high standard for American musical criticism. The emphasis on the expressive center of music bears a strong enough lesson for us all. On the commercialization of American musical life, he is pointed, dispassionate, and only too acccurate; on the situation in contemporary music, brief but very sensible. Was anything gained, though, by omitting names? For musical history, he has no use whatsoever; a conceit more fashionable than intelligent. On the attitude of the artist before the contemporary audience, finally, he is perhaps at his most pungent. He has a rugged confidence equally in his own music, music in America, and music in general; there is an artistic job to be done, and it will be done—"the problems require our best efforts, that is all." It is soon clear that he doesn't care a brass farthing about the public; he insists on the composer's autonomy, rigorously rules out any sort of "compromise"

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(whatever that means), and maintains that if the composer does his best in his own terms, the public doubtless will come to him. The composer's relationship to the public "in any case, will never be for him an artistic preoccupation, however much it may prove to be a practical one." He recognizes no unbridgeable gap between the avant-garde artist and the mass audience, which he describes astutely without mentioning that in point of fact composers like himself are writing today for a small élite, whether they so intend or so approve. If anyone is "alienated" in the present situation, it is, for Sessions, the public and not the composer. Some may find this attitude simple-minded, intransigent, and impractical; others, sane, strong, and productive. Will it not depend finally on the quality of his music?

To make whatever point I can about Sessions' *Symphony No. 2*, I had best begin with a rough description of two sections: the two *tranquillo e misterioso* passages which in the first movement alternate with three *molto agitato* parts. The first *tranquillo* opens with a long, rather naive tune played by a solo violin; what definition it has is imparted by the melodic figure at its beginning. The violin is accompanied by an already fantastic harmonic web; a flute continues freely in the same vein, starting with a motive that repeats a minor third in even notes (as *C-A-C-A*), and soon cut short by orchestral violins and the solo. This opening lyric passage, which is about 16 bars long in 2/4 time (if I may standardize Sessions' notation), gradually gives way to a subdued processional in steady quarter-notes which progress through a shadowy, mainly stepwise course suggesting without emphasis melodic fragments heard before. This grows and subsides over about 21 bars: in the violas, with reminiscences of the opening on the oboe; in all the strings; particularly in the brass; and at last in the strings *pizzicato*. For two bars, the repetitive motive on the minor third prepares the cadence, and the *agitato*. Here the main climax of the movement is reached, and this is followed almost immediately by the second *tranquillo*—shorter but denser than the first, covering the same ground three times in successively compressed, interlinked versions. (1) For 10 bars the solo violin has almost the same tune as at the start, but now the background is incredibly distorted, unsubstantial, oddly out of phase. The brass at once resumes the gliding, plodding music which superseded the cantilena, but for only two bars, and one more bar recalls the repetitive motive which had concluded. (2) It is only now that the flute appears, and with the original melodic figure of the violin; the fantastic accompaniment proceeds; the violas end, *pizzicato*, the walking figure of the brass. In a kind of consummation of the instrumental conjunction previously established, the violin re-enters to play a still canon with the flute. As the violin spins out remote arabesques, the repetitive motive is echoed for four bars among horns and strings, its characteristic interval distended and reaffirmed. (3) The texture fades, and the violin returns naively

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to its original melodic figure, to be halted as simply by the repetitive motive in its original shape, almost unaccompanied. This works again into the *agitato*, which will end the movement.

Now a rough description of this kind, or for that matter a quite precise one, can tell so much and nothing more about a composition. The growth and the relationship of the two sections can be shown to a deaf man, but it takes an altogether different faculty of mind, as Sessions likes to point out, to perceive that the relationship is meaningful in musical terms. There will certainly be no pleasure in this music for listeners who will not feel such significance, in this relatively accessible instance and more generally through the symphony as a whole. Every element in the two *tranquillo* parts—every dissociable entity in the thematic developments and appositions, in the pacing of the intensity and relaxation, in the plan of the colors, in the flux of the harmony—must be grasped to some extent of its infinitely complex relationship to the rest. For this, the description may serve as a pitiful guide; but it may do to show how free and spontaneous are the organizational principles which are actually used. The formal connection of the two sections is no less imaginative and impulsive than the jotting down on menu cards of the never-to-be-forgotten melody and the never-to-be-lost chord; Sessions speaks of a "train of impulse" rather than a "train of thought." Terms such as logical, formal, constructive, intellectual, cerebral, granitic and the rest are only applicable to music of this sort in a special sense which is overshadowed by usual connotations. What they serve to approximate is a quality of musical mentality which deals not in objective mathematics, but in the most complex human expression, and they clog understanding unless this is firmly understood.

The exciting thing about this symphony is its forming of music into a coherent expressive whole in the broadest context. The frustrating thing about it is that it so rarely comes to life on a momentary scale. The listener is rarely captivated by details of melody, harmony, or orchestration; it is literally unattractive music, ungainly even in its most effective utterances. In the first movement, the two *tranquillo* sections should be beautiful, and they come close; but the melodic material for the violin does not make enough expressive sense, the harmonic movement in the brass is not in itself memorable, and the colors do not glisten, in spite of involved scoring. This lack may be due to deliberate principle, to insensitivity, to neglect—or, let me certainly admit, to a peculiar deafness on my part. Of course today nobody asks to be charmed at every phrase of a composition, but there is still use, even from a purely formal point of view, for something sweet or touching or poignant, something suddenly striking, something expressive in the space of two bars rather than over two-hundred. Throughout the symphony, the tunes are obviously embarrassed by the use that Sessions wants to make of them. The two opening themes of the *agitato* are jazzy and rhythmically coarse, and the third

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one is so undifferentiated that it is hard to take it seriously in its rather important subsequent recurrences. The finale alternates a crude, boisterous pair of themes with wispy material which is very highly finished in Stravinsky's manner. With such limitations, it was reckless to have attempted the capricious parody in the second movement, which had really better been left out altogether. I am not saying that Sessions' power of development is superior to the intrinsic worth of his ideas, a formulation which he acidly rejects; in fact it is his tiny two- or three-note motives, in the *agitato*, the *tranquillo*, and the slow movement, which turn out best of all for the over-all impression. The weakness of the themes is only the most obvious reflection of a broader disparity, for during the most inspired of large-scale effects, a sense of irrevelance can develop from lack of trust in the fundamental expressivity of the momentary procedures. Only the *adagio* seems largely free of this trouble. The sombre crisis just before the ending (but not the ending itself) remains in the mind as the focus of the whole symphony.

Remember now that in *The Musical Experience* the lecture on the composer deals almost entirely with the working out of a musical idea, and, excellently, with the principles of musical form. There is no talk of the single gracious gesture. The examples all cite compositions which grow in one sense from musical formulas which are actually below the level of human gestures: *Tristan* from its famous harmonic progression; Brahms *Symphony No. 3* from the motto notes; Beethoven's *Scherzo* to *Op. 135* from a scale fragment (dubious, this one); Sessions' own *Piano Sonata No. 1* from a single polytonal chord. It is by means such as these, he would argue, that the essentially expressive nature of the art of music receives its most complex realization. Indeed the expressive power of his music is in its cumulative, contextual sense, and its expressive failure is in its lack of instant effect. I take it to be in these terms, and in no others, that Roger Sessions wishes to have his work considered.

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Reviews

JOSEPH BENNETT

Five Books, Four Poets[1]

CARL SANDBURG tells us in the preface to his *Complete Poems* that he holds honorary doctorates from the following universities: Harvard, Yale, New York University, Wesleyan, Lafayette, Lincoln, Syracuse, Rollins and Dartmouth. Let me quote from his Harvard Phi Beta Kappa poem, "Good Morning, America":

> *I have looked over the earth and seen the swarming of different people to a different God— . . .*
> *I have met people saying they talk with God face to face; they tell God, hello God and how are you God; they get familiar with God and hold intimate conversations— . . .*
> *I have said: The prints of many new wings, many fresh flights, many clean propellers shall be on the sky before we understand God and the work of wings and air. . . .*
> *Go alone and away from all books, go with your own heart into the storm of human hearts and see if somewhere in that storm there are bleeding hearts, sacred hearts taking a bitter wages of doom, red-soaked and crimson-plunged hearts of the Redeemer of Man.*

Mr. Sandburg carries the disarming modesty of his verse over into his preface, which is a handy, and certainly an authoritative compendium of the dominant institutionalized attitudes toward the art of poetry in America.

On writing poetry (baseball analogy):

> "We find you've got eleven different ways of sliding to second. At what point between first and second do you decide which of those eleven ways you'll use?" Ty flashed, "I never think about it—I just slide!"

On the creative impulse:

> What is instinct? What is thought? Where is the absolute line between these two? Nobody knows—as yet. What is an Emotion as apart from an Idea? When are a Concept and a Feeling identical? Nobody knows—exactly—as yet. What is an ideational state of mind as set off from a reverie? When do the foregoing seemingly contrasted urges of blood and brain move into a confluence with an end result of Creative Art? They're working on it. If or when they filch this secret

[1]COMPLETE POEMS, by Carl Sandburg. Harcourt, Brace. $6.00. THE AURORAS OF AUTUMN, by Wallace Stevens. Knopf. $3.00. VAUDEVILLE FOR A PRINCESS, by Delmore Schwartz. New Directions. $2.75. CEREMONY, by Richard Wilbur. Harcourt, Brace. $2.50. FIRST POEMS, by James Merrill. Knopf. $3.00.

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from the broad bosom of Mother Nature they will have solved the mystery of what for long has been termed Genius.

Wallace Stevens can show us what the American poet *is*, what a lifetime of patient devotion to the highest standards can accomplish in its late period of full mastery:

THE AURORAS OF AUTUMN

II

Farewell to an idea . . . A cabin stands,
Deserted, on a beach. It is white,
As by a custom or according to

An ancestral theme or as a consequence
Of an infinite course. The flowers against the wall
Are white, a little dried, a kind of mark

Reminding, trying to remind, of a white
That was different, something else, last year
Or before, not the white of an aging afternoon,

Whether fresher or duller, whether of winter cloud
Or of winter sky, from horizon to horizon.
The wind is blowing the sand across the floor.

Here, being visible is being white,
Is being of the solid of white, the accomplishment
Of an extremist in an exercise . . .

The season changes. A cold wind chills the beach.
The long lines of it grow longer, emptier,
A darkness gathers though it does not fall

And the whiteness grows less vivid on the wall.
The man who is walking turns blankly on the sand.
He observes how the north is always enlarging the change,

With its frigid brilliances, its blue-red sweeps
And gusts of great enkindlings, its polar green,
The color of ice and fire and solitude.

The cold pyrotechnics of the climax, of an intensity unusual in Stevens, flare up at the end of a line of subdued and unobtrusive movement. "Farewell to an idea . . ." The line starts, dropping, rising, echoing; qualified, conditioned, reverted to, throwing out at last a length of rope preparatory to climax, exact in tone: "And the whiteness grows less vivid on the wall"—a tentative cast, a rope left hanging in the air, a lone rhyme, containing the elements of the climax which is to follow. That it follows with so much splendour and

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so much dramatic rightness shows the trueness of the line which led up to it, subdued and underplayed, but moving and shifting always forward, from the first "Farewell," until the harmonies are resolved and the final chord is ready to be spread in full orchestral color across the keyboard.

The poem is extremely successful and durable. Its values are fused in hard glazes to resist the distortions of time, the fading of the speech of our day, the corruption of the specific counters of meaning now centered in its words. If Mr. Stevens had accomplished only this much, only this one arresting of values from the flux, he would necessarily be ranked as a poet of importance; but when one considers the body of his work and finds perhaps a dozen, perhaps a score of poems to rival this one, one must accord him the stature of a major artist.

To be technical, one is impressed in this poem at the use of the pause, a razor-sharp device which can cut a poem to shreds, but here placed skillfully to modulate the flow of the line, shifting it to a deeper key:

the accomplishment
Of an extremist in an exercise . . .

The season changes. A cold wind chills the beach.

The verses immediately following visualize the change of the season with exactness—it is the "long lines" which flatter the eye. Metrically, the stanza is faultless; among the finest music with which Stevens has provided us. It is possible that here Stevens is listening to the Rimbaud of *Loin des oiseaux*, which has itself an inspired use of the pause; consider

Un orage vint chasser le ciel. Au soir
L'eau des bois se perdait sur les sables vierges,
Le vent de Dieu jetait des glaçons aux mares . . .[1]

in relation to stanza six of the Stevens; and the tone of the Rimbaud lines in relation to the shift in timbre from line 11 to line 12 in Stevens' poem.

If one is interested in watching words work in the hands of a master, consider the function performed by "gusts" and "enkindlings" in giving the last twist to the focus of the climactic vision. "Enlarging," in the preceding stanza, breaks the scene open for this vision. "Blankly," just above this, does more *practical* work than any other word in the poem, being both literally and structurally the turning point for the climax. The first key movement-word in the poem occurs in the third stanza, the "aging" which channels the line of progression inevitably toward its final exfoliation.

Mannerisms which are faults elsewhere in Stevens are in this poem transformed to solid advantages, as with (stanza five) "an extremist in an exercise,"

[1] A storm swept through the sky. At night
The waters of the wood sank in virgin sands,
The wind of God cast icicles in pools.

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where the potential cuteness of the syllable-play is sidestepped and the rhythm rings out clear, reinforced by the assonance. Similarly, the characteristic Stevens rhetorical flourishes, sore thumbs in several other poems in this book, are so rubbed down and disguised that they are observable only as an acceleration of the ictus—"being visible is being white,/Is being of the solid of white." The conversational, casual tone which in Stevens threatens at times to be inconsequential, becomes in this poem (stanza three) a mutation of the carried-forward line, a variation, a qualification of the general effect.

A last note: in the third stanza ("Reminding, trying to remind,"), the mention of last year's white, or before (some prior year's white), produces the exact shade of melancholy which is required for the effect, conditioning it as to time and thus underlining it. In stanza four, "horizon to horizon" should be mentioned for its conclusiveness, its function being to stop the rhythm for the superbly-executed shift in emotional tone in the following line: "The wind is blowing the sand . . ."

In this volume there seem to be three other poems of the first rank. "In a Bad Time" is one, a poem of the aurora borealis, in which an uncanny emotional identification is made with the glacial beauty of the northern sky. The effect of this poem is psychologically disturbing; there is a *frisson*[2] and a very durable one. Structurally, the poem is extremely tight; the lone rhyme, the positioning, down to each comma, is of the inevitable.

The second of these is number III of "The Auroras of Autumn." It studies the qualities of *tranquillity* through a maternal image. The poem has an extraordinary melting effect

> *And yet she too is dissolved, she is destroyed.*
> *She gives transparence. But she has grown old.*
> *The necklace is a carving not a kiss.*

as if fracturing away into light, and the borealis

> *Upstairs*
> *The windows will be lighted, not the rooms*

is properly final and paralyzing. The emotional finesse in this poem is of a virtuosity which is beyond praise.

The third is number II of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." The poem is a distillation of harmonies, a separating out of subtly differentiated keys which cluster around a central, abstracted poise. The poem contemplates the words "impalpability," "transparency" and "sonority," and it leaves an unexpected resonance vibrating on the air, an effect unusual in modern poetry.

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[2]The Boreal Regions at the back of the North Wind; the Land of Death. See Graves, *The White Goddess*, p. 77, p. 362. Mr. Stevens' boreal imagery throughout this volume is of inspired power.

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Number IV of this sequence is successful and effective, with fine distinctions, and a remarkable imagery of the autumn cold.

There are two further poems which, while perhaps not of the first rank, would be accounted important accomplishments in any lesser artist. "The Old Lutheran Bells at Home" is a 'pastoral' which employs a sublimated wit, a perfected technique, and an effective usage of lone rhyme to portray parochial continuities and the prolonged, canorous existence of the saints. Number III of "The Owl in the Sarcophagus" delineates with clarity the most tenuous of psychological states, the "moving mountain" of sleep, rounding out and detaching material that resists definition to the point of being intractable to any other instrument but Stevens':

> *Sleep realized*
> *Was the whiteness that is the ultimate intellect,*
> *A diamond jubilance beyond the fire . . .*

There are many other successes. I especially like number VI of the "Auroras," with its ingenious cloud-imagery and its concluding borealis, again and again disturbing and uncanny; and "In the Element of Antagonisms" for its elegance and its echo of Propertius.

With the poetry of Delmore Schwartz we move to a mind which is preoccupied with self-analysis, which is constantly examining and re-examining its motivations, which is expert in discerning psychological subtleties. Overrulingly introspective, the poet, so to speak, bares his mind before the reader, and the individual poems in this context mostly descry moral principles, often discharging through disclosure some onerous burden of shame or guilt.

Mr. Schwartz neglects to seize upon objects, to exteriorize and formalize. He does not seek to construct and harden a grasped relation or entity until it stands free, unsupported, independent of its maker. He does not detach the poem from its matrix so that one can see around it, so that the poem can take on its own life and duration as the artist retires into the background. His poems exist in relation to his own personality; one cannot conceive of his withdrawing from them; his mind is the essence in the bottles and once withdrawn, the glass would collapse.

This type of verse is outside the mainstream of poetry in our language; it is another fragmentation of sensibility brought about, I suppose, by the desperate conditions of modern life. Mr. Schwartz's poems are not entities; they are windows into a mind. But the mind is powerful and acute. It is also clever, dissonant and metropolitan; and the verse is predominantly, obsessively cerebral. What Mr. Schwartz has achieved within the very narrow confines he has set for himself is authentic and rewarding; he speaks with the voice of our times and (a rarity!) he speaks honestly with that voice, with clarity and firmness;

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occasionally with brilliance. I think it would be of great benefit if Mr. Schwartz's volume could have wide dissemination; one does not hear the voice of our times speak with integrity and distinction in the American cultural scene; what passes for the real thing is generally the sham represented by the Sandburg attitudes.

In this volume Mr. Schwartz has a fine sonnet sequence "The Early Morning Light"; the high point of this sequence, "One in a Thousand of Years," shows what Mr. Schwartz can achieve when he escapes for the moment from his introspective theme:

How beautiful you are you do not know,

Because you cannot see yourself at all
Because you have been beautiful so long,
—The law and lore of jewels as blind as snow.
It is so long since it was otherwise,
—And I will never be as once I was,
Furious at the crossroads, striking at what I do not know.

With a tonality that is exactly placed and a rhetorical progression that is assured and dexterous, Mr. Schwartz in these lines attains the finality and definitiveness that come with the precise rendering of an emotional timbre; the result is a poetic statement that rings out with clarity and imprints itself durably in the memory. These lines should be a challenge to Mr. Schwartz to progress further in this vein, perhaps ultimately to abandon the sterile limitations in which he has fenced himself. "The Self-Betrayal," "Don't Speak, Remember," and the sestet of "Cartoons of Coming Shows" also seem outstanding in a sequence which is in general tightly and successfully conceived.

Among the poems outside this sequence, "The Masters of the Heart" contains a fine passage on Emily Dickinson, but its last two stanzas have a ridiculous mawkishness of sentiment, the only unforgivable lapse in the volume. They are bad and they are vulgar; Mr. Schwartz should be ashamed to have them spoiling away in a book which is otherwise well-controlled.

There are a number of whimsical and mildly amusing prose interludes scattered among the poems, of which "Fun With The Famous," "Don Giovanni" and "Iago" provide the best entertainment. The interludes are written with a sophisticated primitivism, in a tone of carefully calculated naive wonder.

The sequence "The True, The Good, And The Beautiful" expresses a didactic moral earnestness through the motifs of guilt and shame. There is an incestuous pre-occupation with the pathos of the existence of poets, which must be classed as self-pity; there is unguarded sentimentality and a haphazard and careless technique. I must also register my conviction that "Starlight Like Intuition," for all its ambition, is a failure, being too talkative, too synthetically 'psychological' for the grandeur of its theme.

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"To Figaro In The Barbershop," for example, is to my mind a very much better poem; it is, within its intention, completely successful:

. . . Figaro! not the fattest weed
On Lethe's bank in endless session

Knows more than I monotony's
Gungray and endless empty cars!
But what are your immediacies
Amid the thick and curl of hairs? . . .

How shall we come to terms at last
And talk like friends with ease and poise?
All men are strangers dark and lost
All are deceived as girls and boys.
There is a gulf which I detest
Between the self that clips my hair
And the warm beasts lounging in my head
Where past and present soil the air!

It is witty, alert and playful; moving by these means to a sureness of moral utterance. Compare the text just quoted with the 'aboriginal' Schwartz:

And knew I must again confront myself:
"What shall I cry from my window?" I asked myself,
"What shall I say to the citizens below?
Since I have been a privileged character
These four years past. Since I have been excused
From the war for the lesser evil, merciless
As the years to girls who once were beautiful.
What have I done which is a little good?
What apples have I grasped for all my years?
What starlight have I glimpsed for all my guilt?"

To juxtapose the texts—one vivid and realized; the other the limp dough of an unedited confession—is to show both Mr. Schwartz's capabilities as an artist and the formidable obstructions which he has placed in his own path. "To Figaro" displays what should become Mr. Schwartz's most enduring and rewarding vein: the ironic, the dissonant, moving clearly and startlingly, with psychological and technical deftness, towards a definitive statement which is moral in orientation. Indeed, Mr. Schwartz can be considered a *didactic* poet, in the original best sense of the term.

Richard Wilbur's book *Ceremony* must be criticized with reference to the highest and most exacting standards. His work is rounded and mature, and to deal with it merely by compliment and compromise while reserving more

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difficult judgments would be to render the poet an injustice. Mr. Wilbur has stature.

But he does not have enough ambition. The work is graceful, golden-tongued, sweet, even and smooth. But much of it lacks vigor and force, is loose and merely cordial. There are a dozen very fine poems in this book. The rest suffer from facility and most of all from *flaccidity*. Mr. Wilbur writes too much and he writes too rapidly; one has the feeling that everything he writes 'gets printed'; that he has many topics and poems about all of them. There is much talent here, much native instinctive grace with language; and much laziness.

Mr. Wilbur allows himself to be precious, "the too amenable sea"; to be sloppy, "receding fingers terribly tell"; to be meaningless, "on the brink/Of absence" "absence mopes"; to be insipid, "from a gunmetal bay/No one would dream of drowning in." He has a 'conversational tone' that is lifeless, "And I've known/The sea so rich and black/It gave the starlight back/Brighter." His rhetoric is often gassy and 'put-on'; it is often an 'added touch,' not arising spontaneous from the exuberance of the occasion, "To shake our gravity up. Whee, in the air" "O false gemmation! Flashy fall!" He allows himself to be sentimental, with a stilted, off-key pathos ("The Pardon"), with a mushy, screechy 'moral,' as when he ruins the delicate Persian decoration of "Marché Aux Oiseaux" 'Important subject matter' becomes, as always, an excuse for slipshod workmanship and technical mediocrities. He can let his ear go flat from time to time ("Conjuration" "Part of a Letter") and his epigrams and parables are labored and cute. He can be very unfunny ("Museum Piece").

There is no excuse for this. Mr. Wilbur has the ear, the technique, and the intelligence to be satisfied with nothing less than perfection. In one of lesser gifts one would be content merely to praise the praisable and pass over the rest. If Mr. Wilbur had left out two-thirds of this book and published a pamphlet instead, we would have a work of sustained brilliance, verve and sophistication:

Here luxury's the common lot. The light
Lies on the rain-pocked rocks like yellow wool
And around the rocks the soil is rusty bright
From too much wealth of water, so that the grass
Mashes under the foot, and all is full
Of heat and juice and a heavy jammed excess.

Whatever moves moves with the slow complete
Gestures of statuary. Flower smells
Are set in the golden day, and shelled in heat,
Pine and columnar cypress stand. The palm
Sink its combs in the sky. This whole South swells
To a soft rigor, a rich and crowded calm....

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Even when seen from near, the olive shows
A hue of far away. Perhaps for this
The dove brought olive back, a tree which grows
Unearthly pale, which ever dims and dries,
And whose great thirst, exceeding all excess,
Teaches the South it is not paradise.

These are the first two and the last stanzas of "Grasse: The Olive Trees," a poem which is without flaw. There is no flaccidity here. The rhythms are exact; the timing faultless; the language vivid, profuse and carefully disciplined; it is very full-throated and moves with measured ease and amplitude. The imagery is sharp-edged, of remarkable clarity; the mind moves with the tongue; and the poem is allowed to end itself in a blaze of dramatic utterance of the first magnitude.

"Years-End" with its "great mammoths" is a precise and brilliant thing, marred by a forced conclusion, a stanza which tries to point up an 'important statement,' when all that is needed is to let the poem exfoliate from the lines of progression already established. "The Avowal" is deft and elegant. "Five Women Bathing" is an unblemished complex of modulated, serene and subtle observation:

The bathers whitely come and stand.
Water diffuses them, their hair
Like seaweed slurs the shoulders, and
Their voices in the moonstrung air

Go plucked of words.

In "The Terrace," a Monet piece, the purest, most unblushing strains of impressionism are marred with another forced conclusion. "A Glance from the Bridge" is an exactly-observed quiddity, tight, true, and clean, authoritatively executed, as are "A Simile for Her Smile," equally brilliant, and "The Death of a Toad"—all three miraculously phrased and *constructed* down to the last syllable. If we overlook the word "poignancy," the poem entitled "Clearness" must also be ranked with Wilbur's best:

when the snow for all its softness
Tumbles in adamant forms, turning and turning
Its perfect faces, littering on our sight
The heirs and types of timeless dynasties.

This is language that, for all its delicacy, is durable, as Mr. Stevens' is durable. The poem ends with a curious and disturbing vision which partakes of the nature of a poetic charm[3]. "Beowulf" is so good that it compares with the

[3]This "fabulous town" is also in the north; cf. footnote on Stevens' "In a Bad Time." The influence of Crane's "The Harbor Dawn" can be discerned in stanza four of Mr. Wilbur's poem.

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Poèmes Barbares of Leconte de Lisle—the same sort of massive, rapt and thudding, yet rigorous, detachment:

He died in his own country a kinless king,
A name heavy with deeds, and mourned as one
Will mourn for the frozen year when it is done.
They buried him next the sea on a thrust of land:
Twelve men rode round his barrow all in a ring,
Singing of him what they could understand.

Wilbur's is the strongest poetic talent I can see in America below the generation now in their fifties.

James Merrill's *First Poems* is an excellent beginning, and an authentic talent is revealed. Mr. Merrill is an artist who often works with great care. "The Flint Eye," for instance, or "Entrance from Sleep" show a nice control over the language, and a sophisticated and discerning respect for the intelligence of the reader. Their crispness is a pleasure to behold. There is some fine Ransoming in "Kite Poem" and a cleanly-drawn sense of perspective in "Portrait."

Mr. Merrill is confronted by certain dangers. Chief of these is that he publishes far too much; the book is stuffed with mediocre work which tends to blur over the successful poems. Some of the mediocrities seem to have been just "written out" to an ending, and there is a great deal of easy imagery and facile phrasing. The intelligence of the poet seems to lapse at these routinely "imaginative" places; the movement of the ideas, language and imagery slows down to the pace of the obvious, the loose and the unthinking. There is preciosity to be found as well, but Mr. Merrill chiefly offends with his conventional moralizing and his sentimentality. He should be censured for trying to get away with "the bedside of a wound" at this late date. But all these things should be ironed out as the poet develops.

The successful poems include the original and deft "Transfigured Bird," over-extended perhaps and structurally heedless, but a noticeable achievement. There is a beautiful sleight with the unicorn in Part IV of his "White Stag" sequence, and "The House," apparently the most recent composition in the book, is a superb example of supple technique, extraordinarily effective psychologically. But I think the best poem in the book is "Hour-Glass," which begins:

Alone, once can but toy with imagery.
I watch this hour-glass that has been taught
Calm flowing such as you teach me,
For inasmuch as we
Are drop-clear crystal and fine red sand brought
From where sun makes a stab at majesty,
With which each crystal feeds its counterpart,
This form most holds you to my heart.

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The conceit is carefully and intelligently developed; the formal requirements of the stanza pattern are observed; and the language has a gauged and triumphant exactitude. Mr. Merrill can write poetry; he should be watched.

NORTHROP FRYE

The Young Boswell

BOSWELL'S LONDON JOURNAL, 1762-1763, edited by *Frederick A. Pottle.* McGraw-Hill. $4.50.

IT IS NOW WELL KNOWN that a great mass of Boswelliana, recovered from Fettercairn and Malahide castles, has been bought by Yale University, and is in course of publication. The story is summarized by Mr. Christopher Morley in the introduction to the newly published journal kept by Boswell, then aged twenty-two, from November 1762 to August 1763, the year that he met Johnson. The journal is full of narrative and antiquarian interest, but it adds nothing startling to our present knowledge of the period. Its importance is rather that it illustrates a significant stage in the development of a writer of genius.

We may feel that Boswell had no right to be a great artist: that biographies should be factual and works of art fictional, and that they should keep apart. But there it is. Without using a single faked or illegitimate device as a biographer, Boswell has given us a real person who is also a great fictional character, and who keeps obstinately getting mixed up in our minds with Falstaff and Micawber. When we talk about Johnson we still tend, even with Boswell to help us, to make him as dull and obvious as a face on a billboard, whether we adopt the "sturdy common sense" cliché or the approach of Churchill's "Pomposo, insolent and loud." To contrast either with the subtlety of Boswell is to get some idea of Boswell's achievement. The phrase "a Boswell" generally means a silent stenographer, but Boswell was anything but that, and when we turn to his life and character we are mystified. One of the things the Boswell papers should do is to give us some idea of how this strange creature with his spastic will managed to keep sprawling and shambling up to the top of one of the dizziest technical pinnacles of art.

In the art of Boswell's biography two things are remarkable. One is the endless patience and skill with which he drew Johnson out through cunningly chosen questions and situations: Johnson comes to life as a result of what one can only call an exhaustive biographical dialectic, a Platonic dialogue in reverse. The other is his powerful grasp of the organic consistency of Johnson's character: his ability to show that the tenderness and the brutality, the outraged

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bellows and the flashing epigrams, the heartiness and the misanthropy, were inseparable parts of the same man. He saw the wistful Quixote behind the coffee-house buccaneer, and he saw that Johnson's arrogance was really a high courage because of the loneliness it had to conquer. Boswell possessed a very rare kind of sympathetic *Einfühlung* which he applied to others besides Johnson. He succeeded in gaining introductions to both Rousseau and Voltaire by writing a Rousseauist letter, exclamatory and self-deprecating, to Rousseau and a Voltairean one, witty and *épatant*, to Voltaire. To call the motive for these letters snobbery gets us nowhere: we might as well call it original sin. It is at least fairer to Boswell to notice how well he understood the weaknesses of these men, and how uncynical and tolerant that understanding was. In this journal, after a day of letter-writing, he says: "I have touched every man on the proper key, and yet have used no deceit."

Tolerance, like charity, begins at home in self-tolerance, a quite different thing from self-indulgence or self-conceit, however much of either Boswell also had. The present journal gives one more respect for Yeats's "mask" conception of the psychology of the writer. The writer, says Yeats, compensates for his personal deficiencies by projecting an ideal self which is the exact opposite of his real self; his ability as a writer then crystallizes around and expresses this ideal self. Boswell, at twenty-two, noted in himself an infantile confidingness, a desperate urgency to be noticed, and a wit that seemed to come off best when the victim of it was himself. And so, being like other self-conscious young men much preoccupied with social rhythms, he tried to become as exquisitely poised and disciplined as Castiglione's courtier. He assumed that it was possible to grow into the character of "what God intended me and I myself chose" by an act of conscious will. Because his social defences were apt to fall with a crash at the first moment of contact, he stresses the importance of being what he calls *retenu*. No one ever died for a backslapper: the magnetic personalities are those who can suggest by their manner that other people should come to them. "I am always resolving to study propriety of conduct," he says; and "I pride myself in thinking that my natural character is that of dignity." There follows a more rueful entry: "Dempster and Erskine breakfasted with me. . . . I said I wanted to get rid of folly and to acquire sensible habits. They laughed."

In this deadlock a third character takes over, cold, precise and ruthless: the character of Boswell the writer. Boswell the writer works the same miracle of recreation on himself that he was later to work on Johnson, and he does it by the same process of inspired listening, except that here he is able to eavesdrop on thoughts as well. Boswell the writer listens to Boswell reflecting on a spasmodic act of charity: "The creature did not seem so grateful as I could have wished." He listens to Boswell contemplating his ideal image after telling off the mistress who gave him gonorrhea: "During all this conversation

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I really behaved with a manly composure and polite dignity that could not fail to inspire an awe." Then he records how he wrote her to get back his entrance fee of two guineas. And so on. The editor, Mr. Pottle, explains that the journal was, like Swift's *Journal to Stella,* sent to a friend as correspondence and hence written for a reader, and he notes that Boswell will often, writing several days after an event, build up narrative interest by excluding his later knowledge. Boswell noted his own selectivity, and remarks that he wants his journal "to contain a consistent picture of a young fellow eagerly pushing through life." But the sinewy narrative drive of the journal and its constant impression of being humorously aware and emotionally on top of all situations comes, not from the man, but from the mask that conceals the man and reveals the artist.

The result, as Mr. Pottle also remarks, is quite different both from Rousseau's (and Goethe's) factitious manipulation and from the almost inhuman self-extroversion of Pepys. It is quite different too from the only other English prose writer of the age of sensibility who ranks with Boswell: Sterne. Sterne, like Boswell, is a connoisseur of unstudied simplicity, and, though we know that Toby's reactions will always be military, each one is fresh and spontaneous. "Ilus," says Walter Shandy, rationalizing the disaster of little Tristram and the window-sash, "circumcised his whole army one morning.—Not without a court-martial? cry'd my Uncle Toby." But Sterne himself is cunning and artful. Boswell the subject is naive rather than simple, and Boswell the writer is correspondingly candid.

Naive, because, being a prey to conflicting moods, he allows each mood to project its own image of himself and the world in turn. He tries to get a commission in the Guards, and remarks "I do think my love of form for its own sake is an excellent qualification for a gentleman of the Army." He climbs into bed with Louisa and says "I surely may be styled a Man of Pleasure." And candid, because he records all his moods, and does not conventionalize himself. Aristotle remarks that morally there is little to choose between the boaster and the ironic or self-deprecating man, as they both lie about themselves. And, from a literary point of view, they both produce rather facile autobiographies. Boswell shows an uncanny knack of hitting a tone exactly in the middle, vain and ironic at the same time. "I have an honest mind and a warm friendship. Upon my soul, not a bad specimen of a man. However my particular notions may alter, I always preserve these great and worthy qualities." Or, perhaps with more obvious artfulness: "I really conducted this affair with a manliness and prudence that pleased me very much. The whole expense was just eighteen shillings." This kind of thing is the very essence of human self-revelation, and is far above a mere willingness to tell the worst of oneself.

It is fascinating too to read the famous 1763 bits of the *Life* in relation to Boswell instead of Johnson. Like most people who struggle for impossible

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masks, Boswell had father-trouble, and this journal polarizes him between his own father and a new father-figure. We notice for the first time how Boswell's opening conversations with Johnson turn on the relation of father and son, and on the limits of obedience and authority. Boswell's own father, Lord Auchinleck, was a provincial Scotch Presbyterian who despised literature in general and Boswell's writings in particular, and insisted that Boswell should go into law (which, Boswell observes, would force him "to be obliged to remember and repeat distinctly the dull story, probably of some very trivial affair"). Johnson was a Londoner, an Episcopalian monarchist and a literary figure who specifically encouraged Boswell to keep a journal. A letter to Boswell from his father is printed in an appendix: it is the first document of a long tradition, culminating in Macaulay's essay, which can see nothing in the man Boswell but a deplorable ass. Meanwhile, Boswell had been composing, with all his usual tact and skill, his letter of introduction to posterity, which has taken much longer to be delivered, but should give him the last word.

SUSANNE K. LANGER

In Praise of Common Sense

THE CONCEPT OF MIND, by *Gilbert Ryle*. London: Hutchinson's University Library. $3.00.

He knew what's what, and that's as high
As metaphysic wit can fly.

THE INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER of this book is intriguing. A breezy style, full of picturesque and clever summaries of traditional problems (for instance, the description of mind-body relations as "theoretical shuttlecocks which are forever being bandied from the physiologist back to the psychologist and from the psychologist back to the physiologist," or the statement of the solipsistic predicament: "The mind is its own place, and in his inner life each of us lives the life of a ghostly Robinson Crusoe"); a program of iconoclasm and fresh construction; the avowed purpose to trace our famous metaphysical muddles to a semantic source, namely to a confusion of categories; these are promises of a keenly logical, spirited, important book.

There is much in the ensuing chapters that is indeed keen, perhaps more in the way of observation than of argument. The book remains challenging.

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There is a theory of cogitation, almost as radical as Freud's theory of forgetting, in the remark: "People tend to identify their minds with the 'place' where they conduct their secret thoughts. They even come to suppose that there is a special mystery about how we publish our thoughts instead of realizing that we employ a special artifice to keep them to ourselves." There is some genuine iconoclasm in the examination of "that family of concepts ordinarily surnamed 'intelligence.'" "I shall argue," Mr. Ryle says, "that the intellectualist legend is false and that when we describe a performance as intelligent, this does not entail the double operation of considering and executing."

As he states the "intellectualist legend," it is easily enough destroyed. No amount of abstract knowledge can entirely account for an intelligent performance; the infinite regress to which *an abstract principle of correct application to instances* would lead is obvious, and we cannot quarrel with his conclusion: "Knowing how to apply maxims cannot be reduced to, or derived from, the acceptance of those or any other maxims." But this principle does not need the support of his behaviorist epistemology; it was asserted more than a hundred and fifty years ago, on good grounds, by the intellectualist Immanuel Kant. Neither can one refute his attack on the "ghost in the machine" conception of mental performances. But the reason why this attack, and in fact all other attacks on tradition which he makes, cannot be countered, is not what it should be—namely, that his arguments are impeccable—but is that he systematically evades rebuttal by naming no adversary.

Professor Ryle, for all his forensic ardor, does not show any detailed knowledge of what other people really do think, or who holds to the "legends" and "traditions" he is exploding. For instance, he says that "according to the standard terminology, vanity, kindliness, avarice, patriotism and laziness rank as species of emotion. . . ." But who uses this "standard terminology"? Patriotism gives rise to a good deal of emotion, and we speak of patriotic feelings or patriotic excitement: but who has ever classed laziness as an emotion? Throughout the book he never mentions a name. If he were chiefly concerned with the exposition of a new theory, this indifference to the exact tenets of other philosophers would be fair enough; in a book that is so largely polemical, it is not. It allows him to play quite irresponsibly with doctrines he rejects, make preposterous charges and blast the defendant with ridicule, and meet any protest from a real antagonist with the perfectly valid excuse, "I didn't say that *you* maintained such a doctrine."

One can never even tell whether the nameless intellectualist whom Professor Ryle is demolishing is the Man in the Street, or is a real philosopher, someone of the calibre of Russell, Carnap, and Lewis. In his discussion of the "Sense-Datum theory" (Ch. VII) his attack is quite clearly aimed at Russell, Moore, Ayer, and the inheritors of the *Wiener Kreis;* the Man in the Street does not profess to intuit sense-data. On the other hand, the belief that a voluntary

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act is always a double-feature bill, an act of volition followed by an overt performance, is not held today except vaguely by that homeless Man, by his religious teachers and perhaps a few Fichtean moralists. In a serious academic company one really cannot call it "the official doctrine." The result of the author's cavalier treatment of all and sundry colleagues is that he often fights a straw man, so his victory, though complete, is too easy. Were the theories of his opponents conscientiously stated, with all their exact qualifications, they would be harder to demolish, but the tilt would be more interesting.

So much for the polemical portion. Having cleared away many false notions and some true ones, what concept of mind does Professor Ryle propose—or what does he propose instead of any concept of mind?

Mainly, he proposes in place of "mind" or "mental functions" a behaviorist jargon in which "thinking" becomes "saying things in our heads" and "finding a thimble" becomes "having a visual sensation in a thimble-seeing frame of mind" (p. 230). "Mind," we have learned, does not exist, but a "*frame* of mind" is supposed to be something. Similarly, there is no process of reasoning, but "a licence to infer one [fact] from the other" (p. 141). Who issues the licenses we never find out.

The whole reconstruction of epistemology is disappointing, and is not helped by being conducted in popular language that at its best is pithy but altogether metaphorical, and at its worst deteriorates into the sort of intellectual baby-talk that is fashionable in Education schools today. Certain barbarisms like "intuitings" (modeled, perhaps, after John Dewey) might be accepted good-naturedly; but "inference-ticket," "try verbs" and "got-it verbs" are beyond the pale. Philosophically, of course, such mere breaches of taste are unimportant; what is not unimportant is that the desire to speak colloquially has led the author, who has so far picked up and ridiculed every hyperbolic expression used by his adversaries, to use all current metaphors of common sense and present us with an account of imagination, reason, and judgment that is far more figurative than any that Descartes or Berkeley ever gave. The result is not only that a reader who chose to take Professor Ryle literally could ask him in which pocket he "has" an argument, when he says: "Having an argument, like having a pen, . . . is different from getting and from using it," or ask when the "license" to draw an inference will expire; it is also that a reader who wants to understand the metaphors as such cannot get beyond them to a real theory. This is, in fact, a basic trouble with behaviorism: it is not a reformulation of experience (or reform of terminology) which leads to the discovery of new facts or new relevant problems, but one which tends to hide old problems by absorbing them into practical and therefore inexact language. Every "common-sense" philosophy does this; it does away with the most difficult issues by burying them again in the loose popular vocabulary from which philosophers had originally dug them out. The problematic character

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of many of Professor Ryle's assertions is apt to be overlooked because one does not look for exactness in such diction as he uses.

His boldest undertaking is certainly the analysis of imagination. When he claims that a person "visualizing" a tree has no visual image (after saying, on p. 27, "Much of our ordinary thinking is conducted in internal monologue or silent soliloquy, usually accompanied by an internal cinematograph-show of visual imagery"!), and one who imagines a tune does not mentally hear anything, but the one *pretends to see* and the other *pretends to hear*, he is certainly setting up an interesting thesis. Since he previously reduced thinking to silent soliloquy, or saying things "in one's head," the reader is naturally anxious to know what literal account will presently eliminate the metaphor, "in one's head." But the only definition of this intracephalic saying he finds is: "Silent soliloquy is a pregnant flow of non-sayings" (p. 269). Instead of having an image, we are said to fancy ourselves seeing things, and instead of inwardly hearing a tune we fancy ourselves really hearing it; and "Composers, presumably, can fancy themselves listening to tunes that have never yet been played" (p. 270). But there is no discussion at all of what "fancying" is. The puzzles to which the dismissal of images leads are simply not taken seriously; to say that the reason a dipsomaniac cannot tell that he is only fancying his pink rats is "simply a part of the unsurprising general fact that not all pepole are, all the time, at all ages and in all conditions, as judicious or critical as could be wished" (p. 259), seems a surprisingly injudicious way of shelving the problem of hallucinatory visions.

The chief value of the book is that it calls very fundamental assumptions in question. It leaves us, indeed, with more "ghosts" than it takes away: instead of volitions, concepts and images we now have tendencies, capabilities, knacks and habits, licenses, non-sayings and not-doings. Yet there is something exciting, as well as much that is disappointing, about this work; for it challenges one to defend many important premises. As I read it, I found myself writing protests in the margins with growing irritation, yet its quixotisms kept me awake for many hours that night.

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SEYMOUR KRIM

A Trademark of Quality

CLASSICS AND COMMERCIALS, by *Edmund Wilson*. Farrar, Straus. $5.00.

EVER SINCE EDMUND WILSON began writing the lead book reviews in *The New Yorker* his presence in that magazine has been a delightful incongruity; so much so, in fact, that it would make a very nice item for *The New Yorker's* own Notes & Comment department. Twenty years ago, when that magazine was in the prime of its audacity, such a wicked note at its own expense might very well have appeared; but, alas, not now.

For literary people who like to read both Wilson and *The New Yorker,* however, their strange union has been gratifying. Yet it is apparent to everyone —especially *The New Yorker*—that he doesn't fit the magazine in tone or outlook; which is why he is fascinating to read there, stashed in between advertisements for Keen's Chop House and other worldly come-ons. Before, reading Wilson in the liberal or literary magazines was like visiting an elder statesman at one of his favorite clubs, or, U.S.-style, park benches; he was in his element—never entirely, it is true, but enough so to blend with the intellectual scenery.

Wilson in *The New Yorker* is conspicuously serious. Reading him there could give one the impression that Calvin Coolidge has, by mistake, been invited to a New Deal cocktail party. It would be foolish to commiserate with Mr. Wilson too much, however; there is little doubt that he is using *The New Yorker* as selfishly as it is using him.

From the magazine's point of view his presence represents Class, and gives the glossy pages leather-bound dignity; from Wilson's point of view *The New Yorker* gives him first choice on all books, prints him with probably very little editing—and this done on tip-toe—and pays him more money than any other magazine in the country could or would for the same amount of work. The reason the circumstances of Mr. Wilson's employment have been gone into, apart from the fun involved, is that they are not irrelevant to his book, which is composed almost entirely of *New Yorker* book columns written during the decade 1940-49.

It is sometimes forgotten that Edmund Wilson is the only American critic of his accomplishment and stature who earns his living by his work. As he points out in one of the most interesting articles in the book, "Thoughts On Being Bibliographed," he has made the bulk of his living "by writing in the periodicals." He is, frankly, a literary journalist—proudly self-maligned—who by the very seriousness with which he approached this career gave it the status

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of a profession and the beauty of an art. In this he followed in the footsteps of his boyhood heroes, DeQuincey, Poe and G. B. Shaw; these men, he writes, and later H. L. Mencken, were his Super-Egos, and though it can fairly be said that he never entirely outgrew reverence in the bad sense, it is obvious that he has lived up to its demands to the best of his ability.

By having had to earn his living by writing, as did his predecessors, true scriveners in a sense that Wilson has always admired, he is definitely different from his contemporaries in American criticism. One need only think of the Messrs. Ransom, Blackmur and Winters to see the difference; these gentlemen have long been associated with the academic world and no more expected to earn a living from their critical writings than do the contributors to the *Journal of Phenomenology*. Wilson's problem—and therefore his interests—was different from theirs; his problem was how to earn an adult living in the profane world of modern journalism without compromising his tastes or principles. He was therefore placed in a position to fight out in the open for his beliefs: without a villain we can have no hero, and Wilson's confrontation of the mustached fellow—wearing an editor's eyeshade and chewing a cigar-butt—and his two-fisted victory, has a strong human appeal when compared with the musty battles fought by many of his academic contemporaries.

To pursue the high-minded "profession" of literary journalism in a time like ours—even to define it as such—is obviously a more difficult thing than it was in Poe's or even Shaw's day. Then the "literary journalist" could write for a magazine that was understood by his brother, the doctor, and even his wife, and yet he could still scan all of letters; today his brother reads a medical magazine as specialized as the literary one he reads, and if they traded, each would likely find the specialization of the other beyond his interest, if not his actual understanding. The age of the general practitioner is quickly, if not already, ending; and with it the almost historical-sounding "literary journalist," a born general practitioner, whose democracy of interests and skills constitutes his value. Edmund Wilson, then, may very well be one of the last members of a literary tribe; that he has withstood the cultural split to the degree he has is in itself proof of his value, and recommends him to even the Rockefeller Foundation specialists of literature.

Unlike the more exclusive critics Wilson has had to keep his human, or bedside, appeal at the same time that he has had to withstand popular values. He has of necessity forfeited elaborate scholarship or any pioneering literary research of the New Critical kind; he is not a poet's critic like Blackmur or Tate, a critic's critic like Mr. Richards, or even a short-story writer's critic like Mark Schorer. His literary interests—his life interests—have been broad rather than intensive; this has led him straight into an age-old problem, Flaubert vs. Balzac so to speak, and his breadth gives him both his strength and his more crucial deficiency.

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Foremost in the favorable differences between Mr. Wilson and the Newer Critics—placed in opposition here to point up each other—is that Wilson is a professional prose writer in a sense that the others are not. He has always "written" his pieces, as if they were fiction. As sheer writing they give pleasure, as does Eliot's criticism and Shaw's, and they actually create literary taste by being, heretically, literature—not merely a discussion about it. Not only is Wilson the possessor of a style which is keener and more distinguished than that of his opposite numbers; one finds in the articles in *Classics and Commercials* none of that self-indulgent prolixity which Yvor Winters, for example, has gotten away with by publishing in "unedited" academic-literary magazines. Each of Wilson's articles is a small work of literary art, well thought-out, framed, and written with an esthetic and intellectual awareness which finds its way into the words themselves. "It can all be put into English," Ezra Pound once said, apropos a weighty but barbaric critical article where the author, speaking of literature, made his points in deaf-and-dumb language.

If it is a crime for a critic of literature to also be a good writer then by all means let us shoot him, or at least ban his books; but if it should happen to be a virtue then, if only in a whisper, perhaps we should honor it. It seems likely that Mr. Wilson had to sweat over his early writings just in order to beat out his competitors, win magazine-space for himself, and earn a living. This is simply not true of the formal or college-professor critics: not dependent on writing for a living, concerned with criticism as an extension of knowledge rather than as an art, they were never called upon to compress or season their thought for *practical* reasons, as was Wilson. The result is that while several of these critics are more original than Wilson, the results of their thinking are rarely consolidated with his tested generalship and authority. To all his literary evaluations Wilson brings an administrative sense—learned the hard way, one would wager—which organizes the material and makes it march for the reader; Mr. Winters, to clop him once again while he is down, may preach about self-discipline as a way of life, but Wilson, secularist and rank humanitarian, never fails perversely to demonstrate this religious property in his work.

Before going to the work itself it will be illuminating to our knowledge of Wilson to consider his book as a pure physical entity. As his readers know, Wilson has long criticized clumsy book-making, volumes which are awkward to hold, difficult to read—"I've never read Shakespeare because the print's too small," says Cleo in Clifford Odets' *Rocket To The Moon*—and badly designed. He is therefore being most consistent in getting his publisher to issue a book made for the reader's comfort. By the measurement of the ruler the book is four and a half inches wide and seven and a half inches long; if interested, the reader of this review need only measure the average book to appreciate the exceptional compactness of *Classics and Commercials*, the ease with which it fits into the palm and offers itself for being read. Again, consistent with his complaints

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against badly printed books, Wilson has seen to it that his is printed in a very clear and tasteful type, fine enough to take up only the minimum space, but not so fine as to be distracting.

These humane concerns with a book as it effects the reader physically are not extrinsic to Wilson's function as pre-New Critic critic; he is interested in books as social properties because he has society's Legion of Decency point of view, in the good sense, that artwork of any kind should be "responsible"; Wilson does not wash his hands of the literary article when he is through with its literary uses, either as critic or, as we see, as participant, but is concerned with its effect on the lives of people. This concern of Wilson's will be found to be basic to his conception of the entire critical procedure, and will be gone into in a moment; here it should be pointed out that there is another aspect of Wilson which is revealed by the shape of his book. At the same time that its unconventional size is a success, it is definitely quaint because of its squatness, on the one hand, and elongation on the other. The book's design is a virtue that yet causes one to smile because an element of eccentricity has crept in.

This same quality will be found in the title of the book: *Classics and Commercials*. It is fresh and intriguing, yet conspicuously quaint in the use of the word "commercials" to designate book-of-the-minute literature. What is a commercial, in ordinary usage, except a commercial? When applied to the articles themselves this touch of eccentricity shows itself in the form of Yankee stubbornness; Wilson holds principles and convictions with a strict, hickory-stick literalism, and when they are opposed he can become foolish. There is evidence of this in his article on Kafka, which one admires because the critic says what he thinks and refuses to be stampeded into worship, but which is also narrowly obstinate because Wilson sees in Kafka no more than an inferior Poe or Gogol—thereby missing, if nothing else, the deadly contemporaneity and pioneering newness of Kafka's art. This again occurs in Wilson's article on Baudelaire, where he sees the Catholic Church combining with an "Oedipus complex" to give the poet his queer views on love—Mr. Wilson uses Freudian terms like a tourist—but he cannot, in good conscience, see what else "religion" gave to Baudelaire's work.

Here again Wilson's stubborn rationalism refuses to budge in the face of the obvious; as though his recognition of the palpable influence of Catholic doctrine on Baudelaire would constitute a grudging endorsement of "religion", he goes to the extreme of denying all connection between the Church and the poet's work. In view of Baudelaire's lifelong ball-and-chain relationship to Catholicism, which savours his irony as well as his remorse, Wilson's obduracy seems naive.

But this very "here-I-stand" stubbornness, when applied to writers whom Wilson is not resisting on moral or philosophical grounds, gives his literary judgements an unusual firmness and integrity. One regrets that he wastes his

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highly discriminating taste on writers who don't deserve it—Louis Bromfield, so Wilson can make fun of him, and others—but the range of his interests is extraordinary. In his book he considers every kind of prose expression, from Joyce to Octave Mirbeau to Emily Post's *Etiquette*, and the consistency of his literary judgements is such that the reader cannot help respecting Wilson and having his taste sharpened by the critic's own high standard.

Each of Wilson's articles is absorbing to read for its own sake, apart from the literary subject matter; Wilson never writes about literature in so pure a way that he can't plant it in the historical and anecdotal soil of experience, so that it is interesting to the general reader as well as the literary person. He also avoids an over-emphasis of nature at the expense of art; many historical-minded critics, as we saw during the 1930's, cannot resist the impulse to use literature as an excuse for writing about life in the raw. Thus, of all the American critics who were closely identified with Marxism at one point, Wilson most appreciates literature itself. While he does not finally regard the literary article as a complete end in itself, he regards it more highly than any of his Granville Hicksian contemporaries.

As in his previous books, Wilson in the present one assumes the role of literary teacher and moral spokesman for a large group of college-graduate Americans who are not necessarily intellectuals. As in *Axel's Castle*, which taught young Americans of a whole generation about the "new" writers, so in the present book one receives the distinct impression that Wilson is as concerned with communicating what he knows as in knowing it. Communication may be defined as a social function as opposed to knowing, which is a private one; Wilson is concerned with sharing his literary knowledge rather than with developing it for its own sake; this immediately places him in a social role, where he is directly dependent on an audience which can absorb what he says. Without his audience, unlike the more demanding "researchist" critics, Wilson has no function. Just as the teacher absorbs the presence of his students as a mental test for the communicability of ideas, so Wilson has absorbed his audience like no other American critic of comparable stature; thus when Wilson writes about literature he is not speaking as a single individual, so to speak, but as the spokesman and clarifier of ideas which are shared by both himself and his readers.

This is what makes Wilson unique; he sums up American values of a whole generation to the extent that he often reads less like an individual than a folk-meter. Thus to criticize Wilson's basic assumptions is to criticize more than him; he is the voice of the people, in a real sense, and in this lies his local strength and ultimate weakness. His values, which he helped create in his audience, and which they, in turn, helped further define for him, are representative of many now-Godless Protestant Americans of this period. These values are, essentially, pragmatic and humanitarian; they are, so to speak, the unwritten laws that govern all critical conversation Wilson has with his readers. Thus literature like Kafka's or Baudelaire's, which is not reducible to this

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shared ethical vocabulary, cannot be dealt with either by Wilson or his readers except in disparaging or actually uncomprehending terms. To deal with it a new set of terms would have to be developed which signified values which are not popular and which would have to be learned slowly.

As Wilson writes now, he need only say "socialism" or "religion" and this presses a button in his readers; they are conditioned to respond to general terms which by now have lost their real or active meaning. Yet both Wilson-and-his-readers continue to use these terms as if they were as tangible as apples; thus, whatever isn't an apple, isn't; hence even peaches and pears—to go on with this fruit-stand image—must be called apples in order to be digested.

To sum up: Wilson's very bond of communication with his audience, which is based on an agreement of general principles, is what gives his criticism its specifically "American" pertinence and its authority. His readers give him a role and a responsibility, as a family does to a father. But this very sense of responsibility, unique as it is in our literary picture, is rewarding only in an immediate sense; it prevents Wilson from formulating new critical ideas to deal with new esthetic and intellectual experience, and makes him already seem old-fashioned.

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FREDERICK MORGAN

A Note on Ezra Pound

THE LETTERS OF EZRA POUND 1907-1941, edited by *D. D. Paige*. Harcourt, Brace. $5.00.

NOW THAT THE DUST RAISED by the Ezra Pound controversy has somewhat subsided, it may be useful to pause and take stock. The passage of two years has already clarified the situation by disposing of many irrelevant issues. The Robert Hillyer-*Saturday Review* attacks, for example, which had to be met at the time, had nothing to do with Pound; they will be remembered only as the sudden emergence, in a particularly virulent form, of a kind of putrescence that Pound, among others, has consistently opposed.

I write here with a single purpose, to get Pound *read;* and out of a threefold conviction. First, he is one of the great writers of the century, very possibly the best poet our country has produced—my intention here is not to erect a monument, but to testify to the enormous vitality of his writing, and to maintain that it should be read, enjoyed and utilized. Second: by example, by precept, by direct help on the practical level, he has been the strongest influence for good on modern poetry in our language; the facts here are by now largely a matter of record, and they receive further corroboration in the fine selection of his Letters which is the occasion for this note. Third, and here I suspect even admirers of Pound will be less ready immediately to agree, his impact has not yet been absorbed: it is still from Pound, more than anyone else, that the practising poet today can and should learn; and not only the poet, in the end, but the writer of prose (on any subject), the critic, the editor, the teacher, the student—anyone who wishes to keep the language healthy and to use it cleanly in the interests of straight thinking. This, I think, is the important point; for, as Pound himself has often said, we value a writer primarily on the basis of what he means to us *now*. It has generally been recognized that Pound is our greatest teacher in matters of poetic technique (more poets should make use of him); I should also maintain that in a time when much of our criticism seems to have lost purpose and vitality, it can gain from Pound (most directly from the prose writings) a stimulus and a sense of direction.

But there is a value, and a communicable one, that is still more central to Pound. I refer to the inescapable honesty that stands at the heart of all his writing, and that accounts ultimately for its beauty and power. It is not simply that Pound is personally a sincere man, and devoted to his craft, although this is so and we respect him for it. It is rather that in his work the sincerity

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characteristic of his method and his personality is elevated and expanded, beyond the level of technique, into a morality that guides and controls. To think, speak and act directly from the center of the self, to be faithful to the experience in the expression—this is Confucianism, if you like; but in Pound's work it is not precept, but a living morality. And one has to be reasonably blind or insensitive not to recognize in Pound a great, if unconventional, moralist; one who, despite lapses in judgment on particular issues, has stood on the side of clarity, sincerity and order. It is this morality that gives the *Cantos*, despite undeniable lacks and limitations, the scope and depth of major poetry; it is available to us, and potentially valuable as an extension of our ways of thinking and living, whether or not we agree with Pound's particular opinions and judgments.

If Pound, then, as technician, critic and moralist, has much to teach us, and if, further, as poet, he has much to *give* us, we must still read him in order to benefit. And I cannot help thinking that for a variety of reasons he has remained largely unread. The *Cantos* are difficult, of course, but certainly not beyond the reach of anyone who approaches them with a reasonably good will; I, for one, have felt amply repaid for what effort I have brought to bear on them. Their supposed "incoherence" seems to a very large extent attributable to laziness or insensitivity on the part of the reader or critic. But demonstration is not my purpose here. There are "ways into" the *Cantos*. Intelligent criticisms are available (in which, incidentally, notions of Pound's "incoherence" do not play a large part); far more important, there is Pound's own prose, which is also eminently worth reading for its own sake. In the end, each will make the test for himself.

The point is that Pound cannot be dismissed out of hand. The effort to understand him, to cope with him—and particularly the *Cantos*—must be made. The effect of the hostile criticism directed at his work, and of the controversy as a whole—on the higher as well as the *Saturday Review* levels—has been, I am afraid, to reinforce the reader's natural laziness: this writer is somehow contaminated, we need not make the effort to read him. Here we must face up to the chief stumbling-block that might tend, at the outset, to hold the reader off; it is, of course, Pound's attitude towards the Jews. The case can be stated quite simply. Pound *tends* at moments to identify the Jews with usury, which he condemns. (We know that there is historical basis for this identification; we know too that the blame chiefly attaches to the Christian society that permitted and encouraged it.) Pound's antisemitism (and the word must be used here, as always, with caution, lest we make unwarranted leaps) is never given thematic importance or elevated into a structural principle; rather, it takes the form of occasional slurs and contemptuous references. I find these slurs offensive, and I resent them; I should expect any civilized person today, Jew or not, to feel the same way. But

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whatever Pound's personal opinions may be, I do not find antisemitism central to his work. The slurs are there, real and not to be condoned, but occasional and peripheral. There is much more in the work, and more centrally located in it, that is valuable and beautiful. We read a writer, after all, for the good that is in him; no one who is willing to exert the intelligence which a careful reading of the *Cantos* requires will be taken in for a moment by the slurs, unless he be already a confirmed antisemite. Pound's work will continue to be valuable, despite this fault, just as the work of other major writers (Dostoevsky is one who comes to mind) has survived the same or similar ones.

In recent discussions of Pound, his antisemitism (for reasons that are in one way understandable: it *is* a live issue and one that carries a tremendous emotional charge) has been magnified out of all proportion to the place it actually occupies in his work. William Barrett, for example, in the editorial which inaugurated *Partisan Review's* symposium on the Bollingen award, quoted seven lines from the *Pisan Cantos*—and the only ones out of 118 pages that could possibly be interpreted as antisemitic—as though they were representative of the entire sequence. (Robert Fitzgerald made this point in a fine letter that was published in a subsequent issue of *Partisan Review*.) On the basis of these seven lines, and with entire disregard of the courage, the humility and the love which animate, for the rest, these Cantos, he proceeded to the assumption that the matter of the poetry as a whole is "ugly" and "vicious." It is hard to conceive of a more complete distortion. "How far is it possible," he asks, "for technical embellishments to transform vicious and ugly matter into beautiful poetry?" If we accept this statement of the problem—probably a trap set for the "formalist critic," that curiously undefined creature who seems to have no existence outside of the imagination of the *Partisan Review* editors —we shall find ourselves wallowing with Mr. Barrett in the same intellectual mire. One does not value Pound solely or primarily for his technique—and certainly not for whatever Mr. Barrett means by "technical embellishments" —but precisely for his content and his attitudes, which are, for the most part—as animated by the morality I have described—the reverse of "ugly" and "vicious."

With all these considerations in mind, I am particularly grateful for the recent publication of Pound's letters, as selected and edited by D. D. Paige. This book carries an enormous impact; it gives us a year-by-year account, at times a very detailed one, of Pound's unrelenting struggle on behalf of letters, and of his unyielding opposition to the forces of intellectual evil that are dominant in our culture. The story is one of heroism, but of a heroism mitigated and humanized by an enormous humor and a brilliant wit, by patience, and surprisingly perhaps—for Pound is in many respects the most arrogant of men—by humility. This book will provide, for those who need one, a fine entering wedge into Pound's work (much of the prose that would do the

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) of The Hudson Review, published quarterly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1950.

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ELLEN ST. SURE, Managing Editor

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 25th day of September, 1950

LILLIAN E. WAGNER

(My commission expires March 30, 1951.)

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same job is out of print and hard to come by—New Directions, I trust, is remedying the situation), and it is required reading for editors and teachers. Pound's letters are valuable, over and beyond their great historical interest, in that they put us into direct contact with his personality and his mind, a mind that can best be understood when it is seen, here as in all his writing, *in action*. There is no confession here, no self-analysis or emotionalizing; we learn from the letters only the barest details (like stage-directions) of Pound's personal life and his external activities. There is no description of places or events, no filling-in of background. What we see, with extraordinary immediacy and as it were on a bare stage, is a mind dedicated to a single complex task coming to grips with particular situations with unparalleled *élan* and effectiveness.

It is the quality of the mind and the personality on the one hand, and the quality of the expression on the other, that keep these letters as fresh and relevant today as when they were typed off. They rise to meet the occasion; their energy and alertness seldom, if ever, flag. The thought is infrequently developed, but it is invariably individualized and brought to a point—and never allowed to blur or to lapse into platitude. It is impossible to read these letters without becoming more alive to what it means to be a writer, and to the problems confronting literature today. For the rest, there is the record of service accomplished, a service probably unequalled in American writing, and which has not yet borne its final fruits.

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